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*THE AMAZING ENGLISH*

*By the same author*

TOWARDS THE STARS  
SHAKESPEARE THROUGH EASTERN EYES  
THE CHANGELING  
THE COMING OF KARUNA  
INDIAN PILGRIMAGE  
A WHITE MAN IN SEARCH OF GOD

# THE AMAZING ENGLISH

BY  
RANJEE SHAHANI

ADAM & CHARLES BLACK  
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*To*  
*MY WIFE*  
*WHO HAS DISCUSSED THIS BOOK WITH ME*  
*WITH GALLIC PERCEPTION*



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## INTRODUCTION

England has always been an enigma to the foreigner. The Germans have consistently misunderstood her ; and the French, so clever in many ways, have often made grave mistakes about her. The Americans comprehend her much better, but they, too, sometimes see her as through a glass darkly. Can I, a roaming Asiatic, hope to succeed where peoples of the same race, subjected more or less to the same historic forces, have failed ?

The very idea is ludicrous. Have not Indo-English relations been for a long, long time a tragi-comedy of psychological errors ? Fortunately I am not trying to reveal the inwardness of England.

No problem, to my mind, is so urgent to-day as the understanding of one people by another. Psychology cuts right across all political theories ; yet, curiously enough, we pay little attention to it. Some twelve or thirteen years ago, speaking before the World Congress of Faiths, I remarked : “ The soul of man is a sort of Congo forest, of which we know merely the fringes and outskirts.” These words do not seem to date, except in regard to the Congo. There is an exchange of goods in the world ; an exchange of tourists ; an exchange of books and art treasures ; but the heart and mind of other countries escape us altogether. Why ? Because most of us are so badly educated ; we admire only what we are taught to admire ; what is different—*alien*—surprises, shocks, and revolts us. Our range of sympathies is fearfully—I had almost said culpably—limited. Rarely, for example, do I find the English saying anything very revealing about the French ; and the opposite is equally true. How sad !

We must remove the mental curtains that exist between this nation and that, or there will be no peace and goodwill on earth. And here we writers, great and small, have a special responsibility : we must religiously avoid all that creates bad blood between two peoples. Indeed, the damning of a whole country by anyone ought to be made a penal offence. It is, in my considered opinion, the crime of crimes—a sin against humanity. Quick painless death is the only fitting punishment for it.

I am not saying that we must not be frank about one another, but that biased judgments ought to be taboo. Criticism of one another is both necessary and helpful, for the faults of a country may be a part of its charm ; but lies and half-truths have no justification whatsoever, and twisted evidence is unpardonable. Authors should be the ambassadors of goodwill in the world. Many of them have been, not to mince words, unworthy of their hire. “ My country, right or wrong ” is no attitude for a free spirit. He must worship truth wherever he finds it. To say what he thinks and to do what he feels—that is for him the Law and the prophets. Such, anyhow, is my literary creed.

I have thought deeply before writing this book ; but I do not pretend to be exhaustive. Far from it. I speak of only such things as I believe I know. And here, too, I have been selective. Suggestion, not display, I think, is the secret of infinity. Of course what is beyond me—and some things about England and the English are beyond me—I have left out. I happen to know what I do not know.

But this work, however crude and inadequate, is, apart from unconscious influences, entirely my own ; it is not made up of the tit-bits and wheezes of other men.

Another thing. I do not write to please or displease

anyone. Partisanship, I fear, is not my strong point. I am foolish enough to believe that love is ultimately the capacity to value. A mere buzz of the emotions is a waste of time.

My point of view is personal. I cannot help that ; for it is not possible for me to stand on my own shoulders to gain a better view of the cosmos. The truth is, we are constituents of the very phenomenon that we contemplate ; the " I " is our only voucher for reality—including nescience. But there is nothing terrible about that. Individual feeling—the basis of all action—can rise to disinterested passion, which, according to the poets, Eastern or Western, moves the sun and the other stars. "*L'amor, che muov'l Sole e l'altre stelle.*" The transmutation is difficult, I know, but it can take place. We must learn to wait on the silence, which is no blank but a voice.

My opinions are my own. I have admitted that. But I do not speak as a single, isolated individual. Indeed, no. There are many like me in the East. That there are quite a few in India I know from personal knowledge. I merely make explicit what most of us feel.

Of course it is easy for an Oriental to make a fool of himself when writing about a peculiarly Occidental people. The English are truly charming : they usually allow one enough rope ! . . .

What have I done with my bit of rope ? I await your verdict with interest, not unmixed with apprehension.

A pleasant duty remains to perform. I have to thank Mr. T. S. Eliot, Mr. Clifford Bax, Mr. George Hamilton, Sir John Cumming, Mr. R. A. Scott-James, and Mr. Walter Scott for reading the MS. with care and for saying kindly things about it.

R. S.

## PART I: THE FRAME

### I

#### *PRECONCEPTIONS*

WHAT kind of a picture do educated Indians—I mean those who have not crossed the so-called Black Waters, and they are the vast majority—form of England and the English?

Something like my own? Here is a brief description of it.

England I saw through the eyes of its great writers. It was an incredibly beautiful country, a veritable land of heart's desire. All that delighted and ravished the human spirit was to be found there. It was assuredly not the creation of blind Nature; no, it was an objectivation of some god's dream. I would murmur to myself, as some of my friends did

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,  
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
This fortress built by Nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in a silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall  
Or as a moat defensive to a house,  
Against the envy of less happier lands,  
This blessed spot, this earth, this realm, this England.

Shakespeare adored flowers, and mentions, I believe, a greater variety of them in his plays and poems than all the other poets of his country put together; so I imagined England to be a garden, where all was soft tints and subtle fragrances and sweet sounds. Perhaps it really was Prospero's magic isle. Or was it the

enchanted ground on which Titania had left her fairy footprints ?

Spring seemed to me the fairest season in England. Chaucer had praised it

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote  
The droghte of March hath perced to the rote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,  
Of which vertu engendered is the flour :  
Whan Zephirus eeke with his swete breeth  
Inspired hath in every holt and heath  
The tender croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,  
And small fowles maken melodye  
That slepen all the night with open yē . . .

Excellent, that ; but the words that meant infinitely more to me were these

. . . daffodils,  
That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty, violets, dim,  
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,  
Or Cytherea's breath ; pale primroses,  
That die unmarried ere they can behold  
Bright Phoebus in his strength, a malady  
Most incident to maids ; bold oxlips, and  
The Crown-imperial ; lilies of all kinds,  
The flower-de-luce being one.

This seemed to me heavenly. Nothing less.

The other seasons—what about them ? Well, if one believed the poets—ostensible and other—these too had their charm. It is true that summer's lease had too short a date, but it could be divine ; autumn was a period of mellow fruitfulness, when

barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day  
And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue ;  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river-sallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies ;

And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
Hedge crickets sing ; and now with treble soft  
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft :  
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

And winter (here Shakespeare, Dickens, Hardy, and de la Mare combined to produce the impression) was white, mystic, wonderful. After a brisk walk in the snow, I reflected, when the outside world is a vision of the Netherworld (such as is described in the Icelandic Sagas), what could be more pleasant than a fragrant cup of tea before a blazing log-fire in a room with or without a view ?

England, it seemed, hadn't a colourless month. Each yielded its ounce of delight. Lucky country !

The fog—what about it ? I had heard of it, of course : it was said to be dreadful : but I thought of it in a different way. I had seen thick mist on the Himalaya, and shall never forget its witchery. Listen ! It is early morning. Not a sound. Only a faint breath of roses. Around me, as I stood on a hillock overlooking the sleepy valley, foamed a white radiance. It thickened until, in one direction, it looked like a tightly-drawn curtain, so tightly-drawn that I was sure it would soon snap or break. It did ; and through the gap poured cascades of aureate light. Even as I watched in amazement, the sun, glorious and immortal, leaped up, and the snowy peaks, hidden from view, glittered like jewels. I was enchanted. Perhaps, I thought, I shall behold similar atmospheric effects in England. Moonlight through a pea-souper, what colour effect has it ? I was curious to know.

It rained a great deal in England, someone told me, and, what was far worse, the sun often went on strike. This didn't seem to me a calamity. Bombay, too, was wet and soggy. So what ? I know few sensations more delightful than the odour of the earth after a

shower. In the Himalayan foothills or in far away Sind, my native province, the smell of the herbs, after a mere drizzle, used to be intoxicating. Even now, while I am ticking away at the typewriter, I begin to sniff the air. . . . As for cloudy days, they were surely a God-send. Didn't we at such times take French leave from school or college and indulge in hockey or tennis or cricket? One thing puzzled me and my comrades : how could English students, not to speak of their elders, remain indoors when nature was constantly inviting them to go out and exercise their cramped limbs?

But perhaps the English didn't work very hard. They certainly did not at the older universities. There, we learned on good authority, brawn was more important than brains. Everybody, including the professors, was interested in sports. To be a Blue—what happiness! Well, well. The English were lucky in their climate : they could play outdoor games whenever they pleased. We Indians were at the mercy of Varuna (the sun god), who was not only king but tyrant in our country.

The English people—how did I visualize them? They were, I thought, a fine, upstanding lot—men and women who stood no nonsense from anyone. They loved to have a king, so long as he behaved himself ; the moment he became a nuisance they cut off his head.

Rank and degree were observed in England, but each man, however lowly, was at liberty to shape his destiny as he willed and had a voice in the affairs of his country. But who ruled whom, and how? Here I took Tennyson as my guide :

It is the land that free men till,  
That sober-suited Freedom chose ;  
The land, where, girt with friend or foe  
A man may speak the thing he will ;

A land of settled government,  
A land of just and old renown,  
Where Freedom broadens slowly down  
From precedent to precedent,  
And statesmen at her council met  
Who knew the seasons, when to take  
Occasion by the hand, and make  
The bounds of Freedom wider yet,  
By shaping some august decree,  
Which kept her Throne unshaken still,  
Broad-based upon her people's will,  
And compassed by the inviolate sea.

Splendid. Could any Utopia be better ?

The commonest people in England led a life that many a foreigner might well envy. I had read in some novel what a bankrupt farmer ate for dinner ; it seemed a feast, which was certainly beyond the means of countless middling Orientals. But perhaps the English had no poor. I didn't think they had. I had seen no representatives of the race in India who might be called down and out. On the contrary, all of them seemed to be well off. No doubt in their own land, where they were not systematically over-charged by the tradesmen, things were better with them. Books confirmed this ridiculous notion. The rustics of Thomas Hardy struck me as prosperous, and the miners of D. H. Lawrence, even when out of work, had enough money for beer, tobacco, and an occasional fling at the races. The most wretched of these men and women didn't look half so crushed and spiritless as the majority in the East. If a man was jobless it was, I imagined, generally his own fault. He had merely to ask for work and it was given to him. England, by some miraculous means, had banished poverty. There were distinctions between people, of course, but why not ? A cart-horse was a cart-horse, and a racer was a racer. Jude the Obscure couldn't get into Oxford. Sad, since he had



talent ; but why did he make such a moan about it ? Had he wished it, he could have become an architect or a writer (like his creator). Now such facilities were denied to a similarly situated Indian. He, poor devil, remained in the rut if he had the misfortune to be born in a rut. The English masses, on the other hand, had every chance to rise in the world. Yet they were being told

Like lions after slumber  
In unvanquished number—  
Shake your chains to earth like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you—  
You are many—they are few.

Again

Bring me my bow of burning gold !  
Bring me my arrow of desire !  
Bring me my spear ! O clouds, unfold !  
Bring me my chariot of fire !

I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land.

I didn't quite understand all this. Why were Shelley and Blake in such rebellious mood ? What could be wrong with England ? Nothing very much, I reflected, since Tennyson, who came later, said that the country was " broad-based upon the people's will ". However, there was no doubt that sensitive Englishmen were worthy of the highest admiration. Not only did they hate cruelty and oppression, but they wanted everybody, no matter who he was, to be prosperous and happy. They were, indeed, the servants of God.

A little study of English political thought persuaded me that this belief of mine was by no means wrong. A long line of writers, from quite early times to the present day, had worked for the betterment of man. I liked their splendid humanitarianism. Man, whether

born free or not, they said, developed best in freedom. John Ball was not the Father of Communism, as H. G. Wells rashly supposed, for an experiment in that direction had been tried by the Buddha, as also by the early Christians ; but the challenge he issued with a sublime disregard for personal safety

When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who was then the gentleman ?

had not fallen on deaf ears. Indeed, it had acquired tremendous force as it came ringing down the centuries. Decent Englishmen, since the days of the " mad priest of Kent ", had striven to widen the bounds of freedom. Mill's essay on *Liberty* seemed to me grand, but it was not an isolated effort : it was simply a magnificent variation on an old theme. What we were capable of becoming at our best and highest, here and now, no one had described it in nobler terms than Shelley

Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man :  
Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless,  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king  
Over himself ; just, gentle, wise : but Man.

Maybe, I mused, we shall attain that height one day. An Englishman had shown us the true path. But enough. I believed that the best representatives of the English race not only loved liberty and independence but were burning to establish these everywhere in the world. How could I not offer them my homage ?

Of Christianity I knew nothing ; but I had heard from my school teachers—Jesuit Fathers for the most part—that it enjoined brotherly love. From this I drew the simple conclusion that the English were ready to embrace every human being.

What, had I no experience of the English in India ? Of course I had, and plenty of it. I had met them again and again—at my school, at hockey and tennis tournaments, at my father's club, and at my uncle's tea-parties.

On the whole, I rather liked them, but they seemed to me somehow inferior to the English I had read about in their masterpieces. I thought they were somewhat like the unhappy Indians who went to Africa or elsewhere to better their lot. The flower of the race always remained at home. Only the needy, the desperate, and the adventurous ever exiled themselves.

The English women I saw or encountered in India lent support to this view. They were nothing like what I had imagined them to be. I saw no Desdemona, no Ophelia, no Juliet, no Miranda. In fact, there was no one who distantly resembled the heroines I had admired in English books. Once I was introduced to a woman who resembled Becky Sharp, and I was thrilled ; but, I was told, she was a visitor. Exciting English women, I decided, preferred to remain in the land of their birth. This seemed to me but right. Wasn't the same true of Indian women ? The loveliest of them would never dream of living in a foreign country. I fancied English dairy maids to be like Tess ; English peasant girls to be like the picture on Yardley's lavender bottle ; English shop girls to be like the mannequins one sees in illustrated papers ; English actresses to be like Gladys Cooper or Ellen Terry ; and English society women to be like the dream creatures one finds in the portraits of famous artists. There were some plain and even ugly women, to be sure, but they became teachers, or nuns, or the wives of Colonials and Empire builders.

I made no attempt to read English philosophy because, I felt, it had nothing to teach me. In the matter of thought and speculation we Indians had done all that was humanly possible.

What English music I had heard I had liked, though I did wish it wasn't too often so noisy. I preferred the softer passages. English vocal singing of the kind I had

heard, or rather sampled, I did not care for : the women shrieked as though someone were murdering them, and the men roared like angry lions.

Once an English artist came to sing at our college. I am sorry to say that he only evoked our laughter.

Samples of English painting I had not seen but I had read that in that line the Italians, the French, and even the Dutch did much better. Having no means of finding out the truth, I suspended my judgment.

One thing, and a small one, perplexed me : since the English had no superior and inferior castes, how did the servants obey their masters ? In my province, for example, a man of my community would never dream of taking menial service with me. Even if he became my clerk—which was rare—he took unheard of liberties.

I had heard that the English were not particular about their food—that is, they ate anything that came their way. This, I confess, terrified me : I was fond of dainty dishes.

There were other small black spots in my imagined picture of England and the English ; but these didn't worry me overmuch. The general impression I had received was most agreeable. I was eager to see England and to meet the real English—the English English—the compatriots of my favourite poets, playwrights, and novelists. I was under the spell of the magic harp of Ariel in *The Tempest*.

## II

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I WELL remember my first morning in London. Snow ; sparkling air ; 'everything bathed in a dim, mysterious light. I was enchanted. This is exactly how I had

imagined an English winter to be. Somehow, it reminded me of the lovely Lady Christabel.

Breakfast over I went out. Parliament Square was my destination. Arrived there, I stood gazing at the statue of Disraeli.

My disappointment was great. The pinched, ascetic features told me nothing. I had pictured Disraeli as a combination of eagle, leopard, and primrose. The stone image conveyed not a hint of this to me. Indeed, it repelled me by its chilling deadness. I turned away, preferring to dwell with the portrait that my fancy had painted for me.

I boarded a bus and made for our High Commissioner's Office where, I understood, I would get all the advice I needed for prosecuting my studies in this country. Not knowing exactly where to get off, I asked the conductor if he would be so good as to help me in the matter.

"Certainly, sir," he replied.

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it, sir. The pleasure is mine." He smiled pleasantly.

I was mildly surprised. I had expected politeness, but not positive friendliness. Were ordinary Englishmen as nice as all that? I thought—having dined too well on Kipling—that they were strong, silent men who spoke only in grunts.

The High Commissioner's Office seemed to be the haunt of students, who came and went, or stood chatting in little, tight groups. I waited a long time before I was called. The official I saw was an interesting type—"tall, dark, handsome", just like a character out of a novel by Charles Garvice; but he was of little help to me. I realized that I had to fend for myself.

It was one o'clock, and I was pretty hungry. But where to lunch? I wanted to patronize a mellow old

inn, not a garish restaurant. How to find the right place? I stood reflecting as I came out of the High Commissioner's Office. Suddenly something clicked in my brain and I thought of the Cheshire Cheese. I walked up to the first policeman I saw—yes, their fame has spread even in India—and asked: "How can I get to the Cheshire Cheese? Can you please tell me?"

"You want some cheese?" he asked.

"No, the Cheshire Cheese."

"Never heard of that kind of cheese. Better go into a grocer's and inquire."

I thought English policemen knew everything, or nearly everything. Here was a bit of a shock. I told the man that the Cheshire Cheese was a famous inn in Fleet Street.

He smiled. "The joke is on me, guv'nor. You can get to Fleet Street by bus, by Underground, by taxi. Take your choice."

Since I had taken to busmen I mounted a bus. I went on the top deck, which in those days was open to all the winds of heaven. It was bitterly cold, and the seats were both cold and hard, but I bore with these discomforts like a good Buddhist (a feeling which, perhaps, is not widely different from "being British"). I wanted an unimpeded view of London, of which as yet I had only the remote knowledge received from books read thousands of miles away.

When I looked at the houses extending before and behind me in unending rows I asked myself: "Is it possible that the English all live in tenements, jostled together in apartments? Where are the bungalows, the detached residences, the spaciousness, the signs of dignity and leisure which I had always associated with the governance of England?" Ah! there, perhaps, was the source of illusion, for was not the impression given

to Indians of England just that which had been reflected by those who stood for government ?

In Calcutta, in Delhi and Bombay, I have seen in the centre of the city beautiful houses standing in large grounds. From Grosvenor Square to Fleet Street there was no such grateful sight to be seen. Only mass on mass of bricks and mortar.

There was some slight relief in Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square, but Nelson, without the history upon which the English are brought up, did not greatly impress me. It was only later that I realized that the more often I gazed at the famous column and the ill-defined distant figure at the summit, the more their significance grew upon me. And I thought : " How English ! to carry meaning and character in the background where you can understand them at the price of some effort."

The torrent of traffic sweeping by my bus, at most times in two directions, terrified me. It looked as though I had landed in a world of iron and steel. Every moment I expected the poor policeman on point duty to be crushed like a cockroach ; but no, his hand was like a magic wand which the traffic could never approach ; he literally waved it all on one side. My awe of the policeman was for a time the feeling one has for the supernatural and inexplicable. Not for a moment could I imagine myself in his shoes. Now, of course, I know that it is no god-like quality of the policeman, but the co-operation of the drivers and the crowd which alone gives the policeman his apparently irresistible power. A slip of a girl, in fact, can perform his function.

When I got down in Fleet Street I asked a passer-by, a well-dressed man he happened to be, if he could direct me to the Cheshire Cheese. He could and did, first offering me, what sounded in its swiftness like

a technical formula, my geographical directions ; then, seeing my bewilderment, he took me by the arm and accompanied me some two hundred yards until we were at the door of my Mecca. All the time, the stranger showed me a friendly interest, inquiring when I had come and giving me good wishes.

Here I pause to say that it seems to me something marked in an Englishman that if you have occasion to ask your way he generally responds with something that appears to lie between enthusiasm and duty. Never once have I been misdirected. In India it seems difficult for my countrymen to say that they don't know and perhaps, with the amiable but mistaken motive of complying with your request, they will send you into the wilderness.

The Londoner knows his London, and it is his pride to prove that he does. It is not peculiar to Indians, but it is more common, to find in our country people who will not know what is round the corner.

So there I was in the Cheshire Cheese, carefully explaining like a good Hindu to the hovering waiter that I did not want beef in any shape or form ; yet, no doubt by a misunderstanding, he brought me a beef steak, which I innocently ate—in fact, enjoyed—just because I had never before seen or tasted the flesh of cattle. It is the first step that counts ; and having eaten beef, without apparent physical or spiritual disaster, I have continued to eat it.

While I sampled my strange but appetizing food I looked round. Impossible to say that I found what I looked for ; the company had none of the marks of distinction, obvious or subtle. My fellow guests were such as you can find now in any café or milk-bar. No doubt I was searching for the impossible—trying to see my preliminary reading embodied in—well, if not



Dr. Johnson, something nearly as picturesque and individual.

Soon I was passing from Fleet Street and by Underground to Piccadilly Circus. Once in the bowels of the earth—or so it seemed to me—the impression of the vast and complicated metropolitan machine became so keen that I could have fancied the passengers were part of the works. A man presented himself at a window and, with one word and one gesture, received back from the office clerk his ticket after only the slightest pause ; in Bombay, or elsewhere in India, the passenger would have asked for his ticket in many words and would have received his ticket, but again not without many words, most of which in the light of London were in excess. The tempo of life in London, I said to myself, is at a higher rate than under Indian skies. Or is it that the English mind goes more straightly to its object ?

I went to a music-hall, not so much because I wanted the music-hall quality in anything, but for no better reason than the physical impulsion of the garish sign over its portal. Once inside, I enjoyed myself thoroughly, until I saw on the stage an elderly man capering with a young girl and sacrificing all the qualities of dignity which in the conventional Oriental view should accompany mature years. Such a sight in the land of the strong, silent ones was a shock. But, like my beef steak, familiarity bred indifference and, finally, approval. These were aspects of life which fell afterwards into their places in the background.

Next day my business took me to Oxford, where I had no better luck than Maupassant who, looking for dreaming spires under a soft blue sky, found only rain and cold and mist. He went back to Paris disgusted. I too was disgusted, but not put off from my purpose.

Here I had reward of faith ; for in the traditional centre of the highbrow my business among dons was done with the directness and brevity that had impressed me at the London Underground booking-office. In India it takes time to do anything, and doing nothing takes a long time.

But why continue ? I cannot pretend to have exhausted the significance of appearances among the English people. I record here only a fraction of them.

I travelled a little. By now the snow had disappeared and spring was in the air.

Like all foreigners I had thought of the north of England as a black hole of factories and coal and horrid smells. I went to investigate for myself. I was agreeably surprised. Once I had left the big cities behind, with their chimneys belching smoke, I seemed to be transported to another world. There were dips in the landscape, lit by the rich colours of sunset. I remember a beech grove near Durham and I can never forget it : it had an inner and outer glory that no words of mine can describe.

I went to see Eric Gill at High Wycombe. He lived on top of a hill, like a bird in an eyrie, and the way to his house was hard and toilsome ; but it was worth the climb. Apart from the sparkling talk with my host, who was dressed like a composite of Mephistopheles and a country curate, it was the scenery that captivated me. A wood through which I passed seemed to hold green and russet tints of miraculous beauty. It was evening, and for a moment I thought that I was seeing moonlight on the snowy peaks of the Himalaya. A little subjective perhaps, yet this was the essence of the English scene, neither flat nor dull nor majestic. Just tender.

Having seen England all the year round, it is the autumn that remains most vividly in my mind. It is

a study in browns and yellows and the reds of rust or of wine. Everything is soft and mellow. One has a feeling that joy has reached ecstasy and become serene.

The English scene, I said to myself, has baffled the poets, whose highest efforts had never given me exactly the picture that now filled my eyes. If, as I am told with groans of despair, the English countryside is being destroyed by plans of utility, I at any rate shall possess its imprint while I live.

One thing astonished me. The birds in my country sing with full-throated joy without misgiving of what is to come ; here, their notes seemed to carry a consciousness that joy is passing. I heard in this a reflection of the English mood which almost always stops short of abandonment, as though it would be ready for any grim change of fortune.

With all this, the resultant of my first impression of England was disappointing. Perhaps this was inevitable, for the image I had formed was based upon literary visions of appearances that never were on land or sea. The reality was harder, no doubt because it had not the hazy glamour with which distance and the veil of imagination cloak the real.

It was impossible to separate the soft aspects of tree and leaf from the bustling life of the people. London was too commercially-minded. Art, literature, and the life of the soul were set aside for brief periods of leisure ; they were the joy of Sundays, not of the working day. Money was the goddess that the many worshipped. Everything else came second. The city of London was, as they put it, "the City."

I looked round for a face that reminded me of Shelley, Keats, or even Byron. The search was in vain. (It was only later I came to know that by modern English habit only the most minor poet would dare to

look like a poet.) Indeed, few English were interested in the artistic life that meant so much to me, and generally the artist and the intellectual were regarded as out of the running. An industrialist had actually said to me, as a warning to his son, a friend of mine, that scribbling was no occupation for a man.

Boxers, comedians, and cinema stars, I remarked, were held in higher esteem in England than the cultured man. As for jockeys, professional cricketers, and football players, these were exalted personages, only slightly less important than Cabinet Ministers.

All this confused me, for the history of this people showed that in moments of crisis their inspiration came from a higher source or level. Their superficial valuations, for a time, deceived me. I began to reflect.

I came to the conclusion that it is unwise to judge a people by its literature. This is particularly true of romantic literature, which in English is conspicuous. It exaggerates and idealizes unconscionably (though, no doubt, its reacting influence is strong and its effects palpable). To understand the texture of life of a nation we have to go not among the *élite*, but—where? For a long time I did not know. Gradually I perceived that the total or even the ultimate awareness of a country never gets into its books. The supreme spirits do not write. Think of the Buddha or of Jesus. And we Indians have expressed just a fraction of ourselves in our literature. Perhaps the same was true of England? It was. The words of the English may or may not be revealing, but their silences, as André Maurois noted, can be very eloquent.

There was, it appeared, no way of knowing the English except by living amongst them and paying some attention to the historic influences that have acted upon them. This I began to do. I met with no difficulties and vexations. None whatsoever. Indeed,

I received nothing but kindness. Are not some of my dearest friends English? And I must say that I have been able to get along uncommonly well with the common people. This reminds me of a dictum of Colonel Lawrence, who has said somewhere that the less one sees of the English the better. My experience has been quite different. The more intimately I have known the English—no matter of what class or culture—the more I have liked them. This is not to say that I find no fault with them. Of course I do—on occasion. But a country should be judged by its best. Sometimes its very defects are a part of its appeal or strength. Only illusion is perfect.

The English are to my mind the most mature people in the world. What do I mean by this? I hope to make my point clear, but to do this I must begin again.

## PART II: THE PICTURE

### III

#### *THE COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE*

Who, where, what is the Englishman? Defoe tells us that he is a myth

A true-born Englishman's a contradiction :  
In speech an irony, in fact a fiction,  
A man akin to all the universe.

Apparently there is no such being as an Englishman. Who then, we may well ask, is it that has been encountered in every part of the world under his name? It is a man of various and not altogether traceable origins. From these he takes qualities sometimes conflicting but in a larger sense compensatory. He is, therefore, perhaps more many-sided than the men of most other countries. Not very different from ourselves, we Indians may reflect.

We need not attempt a history of the Englishman's mixed ancestry, but only to look at his plainer characteristics. Northern in physique, he has much of the mentality of the southern races from whom he takes his cultural background. He is well able to contend with rivals of the north and to understand those of the south. It is part of the paradox that while separated from the rest of Europe, he is more European than his Continental neighbours. Once splendidly isolated, both geographically and politically, as was too impulsively thought, he was then, as he is even more now, a citizen of the world. The spiritual conflicts which the Latin, the Norwegian, and the Russian find new, in attempting to assimilate alien thought, the

Englishman finds as a drama that is being played out in himself, where there has been an internal struggle to reconcile warring qualities.

Need more be said to explain this incalculable cocktail of a man ? Still, there are some obvious and more or less superficial grounds for his qualities to be found in his geographical and climatic environment.

First, he lives on an island, and a small one at that. This jewel set in a silver sea is inviolate ; there are no land frontiers ; and during most of England's history men have had no need to live in fear and on guard. In a sense, not common in the world, they have been able to cultivate their gardens and their souls. England has been seen, by more than one discerning observer, as a hot-house in the shelter of which has been produced the only gentleman ; yet with a quality of fastidious existence that has aroused the mingled admiration, envy, and resentment of other nations, the Englishman is as tough as any man on earth. The east wind is in his blood, and no climate is too hot or too cold for him. In an atmosphere of such variability that no one knows what to wear for two days together, his organs are adapted from infancy to meet sharp and swift changes. When I first landed in England J. M. Robertson, the well-known Shakespearean scholar, warned me : " Remember, in this country always carry your umbrella on a fine day ; on other days do as you damn well please."

It is very easy to understand why the Englishman has been able to make his home in Calcutta or Timbuctoo.

We may note that these wide differences of the English climate always stop short of the intolerable, so that here a man can spend more hours in the open air than in any other country—an advantage that makes for wealth of every kind. The Englishman can work and play at any hour of the day and—as long as there

is light—of the night. Hence the out-door existence, the addiction to sport, incessant activity, muscular prowess are part of his habit of body and mind. For we should remember that the physical life into which man is born and in which he lives governs his mental outlook as well as his body. In such surroundings, where there is little hindrance to effort, everything seems possible. Confidence in attempting the apparently impossible becomes an element of the Englishman's incalculable character.

In this climate the light is neither glaring nor very long sustained ; it grows gradually and fades by gentle degrees. There is twilight, a soft, low illumination unknown in brilliant climes. There is a mist here, there is occasional fog more baffling than any darkness. We can readily understand why the Englishman constantly looks beyond the thing seen and plans imperceptibly when nothing can be seen. Here we have the “ practical mystic ” of history.

Other peoples, especially orientals, find this practice in graduation hard to comprehend, for they are accustomed to opposites in sharp outline. With them, night is night, dark and impenetrable, perhaps peopled by phantoms ; and day comes and goes in a flash, without warning.

For my countrymen—to speak only of them for the moment—this English light and shade of the physical atmosphere and of the mind is not in the natural order and is not understandable unless they have been for long transplanted.

We may ask why in this climate made for the open air man the Englishman is said to be the laziest of human beings? A partial reason for this may be that laziness is a physiological condition, which when pleasurable is an expression of well-being ; but there is no doubt a stronger external influence to account for



this indolence of a characteristically active person. While he has not to support the unbearable extremes, as I have said, the dampness of the climate has strange effects. Degrees of heat quite endurable to the Englishman in Calcutta or on the Persian Gulf become insupportable, even to him, in England. That is the effect of the moisture with which the air is laden ; but that moisture has another effect far different. It modifies the vision. For those minute particles that form the clouds, "spumèd of the wild sea snortings," alter the perspective of all outward things. The distant object is projected nearer, all outlines are blurred or softened, nothing is sharply defined. We see things in a haze of glory or of gloom, and what we are habituated to see with the physical eye we look for with the mind—"the eye within the eye", as we Indians put it. There is in England a perpetual transfiguration of the real.

This aerial quality in the atmosphere gives the habit of looking for things which to people of another climate are not obviously there. The Englishman understands well the leader who said : "The secret of life is to discover what is on the other side of the hill." All this may be related to the clairvoyance that characterizes the Englishman's way of thinking. He comprehends when he says almost as a refrain : "I see." His knowledge must form a picture in which he places himself in the foreground or background, as onlooker or actor, according to his nature.

A prevailing note in England is that of moderation, in scenery and climate. The hills and dales and rivers seem to an Indian those of a garden. Kipling must have felt this when, on returning home from India, he wrote with tenderness of "this clipped and washen land".

The feeling of a garden arises instantly because the area of the country is one easily encompassed in knowledge and in memory. None of the natural features is

overwhelming, none so big as to inspire awe, none unexplored, and no mysterious corners so untouched by the hand of man that we feel, as we often feel in India, here is a divine preserve holding the magic and secret of things still unseen and unknown. If this simplicity is broken at all, we come nearest to grandeur in Scotland, where there are indeed no Himalayan heights but mountains difficult of access and lochs that hold a certain element of mystery, though no more impressive than the Loch Ness monster. If there is here something less than the grandeur of the unattainable, there is a compensating charm, which arouses American and Indian visitors to ecstasy that leads them to forget more awful recollections of the Rockies or of Everest.

The beauty of England is then, without insisting on the likeness, that of a miniature in comparison with the unexplored wastes and jungles and mountain fastnesses of the vaster East and West. Over all spreads the green sea of turf and foliage, unapproached elsewhere. This is the crowning gift of this abused climate of rain and mist. Here are no treeless wastes but, on the contrary, a lovely fringe of delicate tracery, from the impressive, age-old oak to the dainty silver birch and graceful elm.

I know the gorgeous colouring and prodigality of the foliage and flowers that tower above us in India, but still my eye rests gratefully on the variety, softness, and beauty of the English scene.

These things have their effects upon the English mind, and we shall have occasion to remember them when I attempt to analyse the English character ; but I suggest that no easy conclusions should be drawn. We shall not find the Englishman to be at all times a gentle and philosophic gardener. He is that sometimes, no doubt, but *ils sont durs*, as a Belgian said of the English when the world was waiting to see whether they would strike in 1914. Perhaps for reasons which I shall venture

to suggest the Englishman is a bundle of contradictions, a living paradox, always what we would not expect. For the present, let me say only that it is not for nothing that the world has heard of the "mad Englishman". Mad he is not, as we shall find when we have come nearer to his secret. Amazing he is always. We shall see how.

## IV

## FOOD

THE art of cooking and the art of eating are criteria of the level of civilization to which a group of people has attained. The French, the Chinese, and Indians will agree. What about the English?

Most of them will frown. They will refer to the Bible and say: "It is not what goes in that defiles a man..." Some would go further and affirm, as a distinguished Englishman, who knows his Europe, affirmed the other day (in private conversation, of course): "The more barbarous the country, the better the food."

Have we here an irreconcilable opposition between the English and some other peoples? Let us see.

It seems to me that the elaboration of the culinary art follows a people's activity of mind. This would account for the richness and variety of eating, say, in Moscow, and for the notorious feasts of Lucullus provided by the Soviet officials in London and elsewhere. There is no doubt that the oriental or the semi-oriental puts value upon eating and drinking as entertainments. That is not common in the West, except in the Latin countries. The English appear to seek in their feeding nourishment pure and simple. They do not make an art of it.

That is just what irritates many foreigners. They say

that elegance, originality, diversity, and imaginativeness are not, and have never been, the virtues of English cooking. Take, for instance, the banquets of the seventeenth century as chronicled by Pepys. There is little of the epicure discoverable in them. The same remark applies to the gustatory achievements of Dr. Johnson. In fact, the English, as a people, do not appreciate the difference between "highly fed" and "fully fed". They generally speak of a "square meal"; a dish that resembles "a poem" is not for them.

"In our cooking," say the French, "there are taste, delicacy, genius, even inspiration. Go to any small restaurant in the remotest part of our country, and ten to one you will get a dainty meal. In England, on the other hand, in the most exclusive hotels they give you merely larger quantities of the staple foods."

The grumble continues: "The English don't entice you with the delights of the kitchen. They forget that after an indifferent lunch it is not possible to admire the scenic or artistic beauties of their country. One isn't in the right mood. The palate does enliven the eye."

The English, barring a few gourmets, do not agree. They consider it slightly vulgar to take delight in food. Meals, they believe, must be bolted down, not tasted. That is their way.

As for variety, they don't care for it. There is a friend of mine, an English artist who in the halcyon days of the 'thirties had always for lunch steak and chips, which he washed down with the good old ale of his country. Well, his portraits had an astonishing sameness about them: every face, male and female, looked smug or sleepy. I hope it will be believed when I say that spam did his art much good: his sitters suddenly woke up and seemed for some reason angry, or spiteful, or just melancholy.

The English don't care for sauces and are, indeed, highly suspicious of them. They want to know what they are eating : their cabbage must look like a cabbage ; and so everything else. Disguise is hateful to them.

The other day an English scientist said to an Indian scientist : " We prefer our food to taste of itself, not of something else."

" Really ! "

" Well, yes. Take, for instance, potatoes. I hate to see them done up in the Continental fashion. Their individual flavour is destroyed. I want my potatoes to have the taste of potatoes."

" You don't say so ! "

" Of course I do."

" Then you should eat them raw. What you mean is that you and your countrymen enjoy *boiled* potatoes. Personally, I can't bear the sight of them."

The English scientist saw the point and laughed. " Man is a creature of habit," he said philosophically. Then, after a pause, he added : " But it is true that our materials are the best in the world."

" Another popular fallacy."

" Popular, indeed ! Have you tasted the beef of good old England ? "

" Of course I have. Normandy, to my mind, does better in that line. As for your joints, only a Gog and Magog can masticate them. About your vegetables, you have precious few, and what you have are tasteless. You grow them beyond their best condition. Your peas remind me of bullets."

" What are you driving at, my friend ? "

" That your foodstuffs aren't too good and that your cooking is a recipe for indigestion."

This is an exaggeration, to be sure ; I have had some excellent meals in England—not in hotels, I must

say, but in private houses. I am inclined to conclude from this that we must not judge the English by their commercial cooking. The people have not yet become tourist-minded. In fact, the general feeling is that anything is good enough for a foreigner.

The English waiter is a trial. He looks at you, and does not see you. When he deigns to notice you, he seems to resent your presence or appearance, and to grudge the attention he must give you. How, in these circumstances, can a stranger be composed in spirit or look for little pleasant surprises? Why, he is in a bad temper even before he has tasted the first dish.

In eating as an art, the state of mind is decisive. English hoteliers never seem to realize this. In truth, charm—in every sense of the word—is unknown to them. If they are to attract foreigners to England they must revise their methods from beginning to end.

The English housewife, when she is herself fastidious, selective with her materials and firm with her butcher, can produce very good dishes. What have I eaten with relish? Yorkshire pudding—as they do it in Yorkshire; kippers, apple dumplings, treacle tart. Devonshire cream is, of course, delicious, and Stilton cheese is not to be missed.

But there is nothing to beat a high tea in England. We get delicacies that are to be found nowhere else.

It is said that the English can't make coffee. This is simply not true. The best coffee that I have tasted has been in England.

Having said this I am bound to add that English cooking cannot possibly compare with the Indian. We prepare dishes that would make Boulestin's mouth water. I am talking not only of our upper classes, but of all sorts and conditions of Indians. Can anybody be poorer than a pauper? Well, there are Indians who beg in the morning and run restaurants in the evening.

The meals they prepare are delicious. We eat at their places as a welcome change.

English cooking, at its best, is lacking in *finesse*. It is good in a plain way. In most cases, however, it is rather primitive, and is responsible for the heavy, plodding strain in the English character. Beer and beef and boiled potatoes, year in and year out, are not conducive to divine theoria. But the English smile pityingly : it is not what one eats that matters, they say, but the way in which one eats it. So they concentrate on table manners. Think of the courage it requires to consume broth, or brussels sprouts, or cabbage, or fish that has the *gôut* of fish (Oh, horror !) with the utmost elegance.

Most English people cannot distinguish between good and bad fruit. I have seen society women eating green, unripe bananas with relish !

As for pickles and preserves and dried fruits, the English, in fact all Europeans, are far behind us Indians.

"The history of our country would have been different," a witty English friend tells me, "if so many of our legislators did not suffer from indigestion." In all this I shall not venture to give the balance of absolute truth. But what puzzles me is that the English know the limitations of their cooking and do nothing about it.

An odd people, to say the least.

## V

### DRESS

FOR male attire, of the Western variety, nothing can surpass England. If you want good clothes, Savile Row is the place for it. All discriminating foreigners know

this. There is a distinction about a well-cut English suit that is not to be found in any other country.

Indian tailors are terrible in this matter : they make you look like a scarecrow. And their English *confrères* in India seem to be affected by the circumambient influences. They produce trousers that are too wide or too narrow, never just right ; and the coats either flap round you or constrict you. The waistcoat is generally right ; but you can't go about in a waistcoat alone, can you ? Even Gandhi had to have something round his loins.

Of the art of French tailors I need not speak. They make you look like a *gigolo*.

But if English tailors are the best in the world for men, I cannot say that most Englishmen are well-dressed. Indeed, they are not. Too many of them do not know how to match their clothes. I have often seen walking rainbows. Then there are men who wear brown shoes with a dark blue suit or black shoes with a brown suit. And their shoes are clumsy in size and shape. Take it as you will, I always judge men and women by their shoes. An elegantly-shod foot says a lot.

Englishmen have taste in ties, apart from old school ties, which are often an abomination. Their socks are apparently for protection against insects or thorns. The luxury of silk is beneath them, except for evening dress.

However, a well-nurtured Englishman is the best dressed man in the West. And among uniforms there is nothing to compare with those of the English army and naval officer. Even Germans, one remembers, were envious of them.

American men cannot dress well without overdressing. A sporting American almost rivals the German.

In male attire, I repeat, the English are in a class by themselves.

As for the clothes of women, that is another story.



Here, the French are far ahead. A small French *couturier* in a provincial town will turn out a frock that an English dressmaker can only admire in despair. The smart houses in Paris provide the model for the Western world.

In this sphere the French have a creative genius which remains a mystery. They invest the female form with imagination, but without distorting it.

"Do you 'think,'" said a customer to a French *couturier*, "that this will suit me?"

"Not suit you, Madame, but it will make you to be remarked."

There we have a secret. The French dress makes a woman more emphatically a woman.

Even under the war conditions, which in France were beyond comparison more stultifying than in England, the French control of style was not destroyed. Compare the fashion magazines of the time in Paris and London.

English dressmakers have little originality in this work and little confidence in it. They are afraid to depart from the French model.

The French excel equally in the eccentric creations known as women's hats. The English, my wife tells me, "make lids for heads."

Children's clothes are, in France, things of beauty; in England they may pass if the mother has taste and resources, which appear to be uncommon. Little English girls lack nothing in beauty or sturdiness and especially in that unsurpassed colouring that their skin owes to the climate. Their dresses, however, tend rather to conceal than to enhance these gifts.

I have said that the Frenchwoman knows the art of dressing as few Englishwomen do; but, characteristically, it is for the Englishwoman to show how to wear and to walk in tweeds.

One thing I cannot understand about Englishwomen. Even when they have the means, they resort readily to second-hand clothes. Titled ladies are not excluded from those who find the practice tolerable. To us Indians such a subterfuge is unthinkable. The feelings associated with worn clothes would forbid it: we should be unable to separate the garments from their former owners.

I have laid some emphasis upon the art of dressing possessed by Frenchwomen, because its pre-eminence is unchallenged among Western nations. Even so, I have no hesitation in presenting the æsthetic beauty of the dress of Indian women as surpassing the French even more than the French surpass the English.

It is not only the fineness of tissue in the materials used by Indian women, but the grace with which they drape the figure, concealing here, and emphasizing there. The sari is well known, though perhaps only in its simplest use as worn by the few Indian women to be seen in England. The wardrobe of a high-born Indian woman is a fairyland of colour and potential shape.

I need not speak of our women's jewellery, which in richness and variety represents an æsthetic atmosphere unknown in any Western society. We understand, I think, that the gems worn may reflect the perceptions and taste, even the reserves, of their wearer. In this art we are unapproached.

All these graces and resources of the Indian, as of the French, the English are aware of; yet it is characteristic of their strength and their insularity that they rest content within the narrow lines of their own habit. It would need something like another volume to analyse the climatic and psychological influences which are at the root of these wide distinctions of appearance.

However, here we have another aspect of English oddity.

## VI

### DWELLINGS

THE interiors in which the English live do less justice to their intelligence than does their cooking or their dress. The peculiarity here is that they complain as much as their visitors from East or West.

In winter one is cold or in danger of being burned alive. In fact, the heating system is crazy : it is dangerous, dirty, uneconomical. We pass generally from an unequally-warmed sitting-room, possibly overcrowded, to an ice-box of a bedroom. We are expected to be Spartan in our resistance.

In summer the intake of sunshine is accidental and erratic ; the ventilation takes no account of the extremes of heat and cold to which we may be exposed in a single English day.

The best that can be said for the average English house is that it is a protection from greater rigours outside of it.

The furnishings of an English home correspond to these inconsistencies. The house, in almost every case, appears to be planned for the impression that may be made upon the visitor. There is the ubiquitous drawing-room, chock-a-block with nick-nacks and *objets d'art* and, at its lowest, rarely used, except to house a piano which nobody plays, and chairs and sofas more crudely ornate than comfortable or tasteful. It is a museum of dead exhibits. The English, as a people, do not understand the beauty of empty spaces.

For bedrooms, there is the disproportionately large refuge of the master and mistress of the house, the children being relegated to an attic and the servant, if there is one, to a cubby-hole on the same floor.

The English home is uncomfortable. Very, very uncomfortable.

A Russian artist once asked Bernard Shaw : " So you are leaving Adelphi Terrace ? Aren't you sorry ? "

" Yes . . . but in the new place we have a bathroom."

I found it hard to believe this story. I cannot imagine a reasonably well-off Indian living in a house where there were no facilities for a daily bathe.

Why is the average Englishman so anxious to quit his house for his club or the local pub ? It may be that he prefers the company of his own sex ; but that is not the whole truth. The fact is, he finds his family surroundings dull and drab. He wants change and, if possible, a little luxury. This explains the appeal of Lyons' Corner Houses—" Taj Mahals of the British bourgeoisie," as someone has sarcastically called them.

An Englishman's home is his castle, or it used to be, for I am told by outraged citizens that authority can now enter their houses at any time or even take them away. No doubt this assertion, given to me in anger, has to be qualified, but it is not wholly without foundation.

Of real comfort the English appear to be ashamed. Take, for instance, their beds. By Krishna, they are hard. And how badly they are made ! In every English home where I have slept in winter I have shivered, though I can bear a lot of cold. Where is the snag ? Well, if you lie in your bed like a log, all is well ; if you toss about ever so little, your feet at once poke out. In France you sleep as in a warm nest.

English pillows are made to give you a pain in the neck. Your head is lifted at a sharp angle above your shoulders. The capacious French pillows will accommodate your head and shoulders together.

It is only fair to say that the sheets of an English bed

are generally clean, though usually coarse. In France, you can never be sure. As for Indian beds, they are even harder than the English, but you can forget this because of the silken luxury of the sheets.

English plumbing is an international joke. You are lucky if your pipes don't burst in winter. Why, sometimes you have to wrap them up in wool, for all the world as though they were the legs of a gouty old gentleman. I rarely heard of a pipe bursting in France, though I have travelled a good deal in that country. Then the English pipes have a tendency to choke up. Such a thing is rare in India.

I am bound to say a word about English windows. They remind me of the guillotine. And what trouble you have in shutting or opening them ! Often the cords refuse to do their duty. You have to press and push them to get any results. Then, too, all depends on the temper of the window. One day it behaves well ; another day it is absolutely mulish. It will only listen to the carpenter.

We Indians, on the other hand, are free from this inconvenience because our windows are always open. I had never heard of the word *courant d'air* until I came to Europe.

The English housewife has a great deal to put up with. I admire her courage, her patience, and her smiling acceptance of all the bothers that a man-made world has created for her.

Of course, there are houses in England that possess every imaginable comfort, but I am talking of the habitations of ordinary people like ourselves. We have to endure a lot of unnecessary annoyance.

But perhaps the rulers of England feel that luxury is not good for the common mortal. I am sorry, but I cannot agree with them ; and I am glad to think that the most English of Englishmen, Dr. Johnson, is on my

side. Listen to what he said when Goldsmith maintained that the English were degenerating because of luxurious habits.

“ Sir, in the first place, I doubt the fact. I believe there are as many tall men in England now as ever there were. But, secondly, supposing the stature of our people to be diminished, that is not owing to luxury ; for, Sir, consider to how very small a proportion of our people luxury can reach. Our soldiery, surely, are not luxurious, who live on sixpence a day ; and the same remark will apply to almost all the other classes. Luxury, so far as it reaches the poor, will do good to the race of the people ; it will strengthen and multiply them. Sir, no nation was ever hurt by luxury.”

That is the truth. What ruins a people is poverty—material, moral, mental, or spiritual. We want, everywhere, more and more, what Charles Morgan is never tired of telling us, *douceur de vivre*.

## VII

### AMUSEMENTS

THERE is a firmly held belief in most foreign countries that the Englishman is sports-mad ; but we shall not understand him until we learn to put the emphasis on sport, not on the madness which its extreme forms sometimes suggest. The method and good humour which distinguish sport from fighting are rarely lost. Mussolini knew this when he forbade the Italians to hold meetings in the open air, and explained why. “ If,” he said in effect, “ you could meet as they do in Hyde Park and argue your questions to the utmost and go home laughing, you could meet as often as you liked. But as you cannot meet to talk out your ideas

without breaking each other's heads, such meetings are forbidden."

It may be the national temperament, or it may be his long experience, but the Englishman knows where to stop in games or in argument. When opposite views are not to be reconciled he falls back on a joke and laughs : when he loses a game it is with him a sporting principle to accept defeat with good grace and congratulate the winner. That remains essentially true even when the White and Red Roses of the north or Scotland and England are contending. Though some of the historic feud remains, the game is still a game.

How does the vogue of sport arise? There are reacting causes and effects. The original cause may be that a community of contentious men seeks release for primitive instincts and finds it in a struggle controlled by agreed rules. The effects in good temper and discipline being entirely good, the whole scheme of sport becomes a recognized part of the educational system. Hence its universal practice and elaborate, even artificial, development. As for the game, which can hardly be called a contest, so gentle is its exercise, such as village cricket, golf, and so on down to bowls and marbles, one may venture an explanation that almost approaches mysticism. One has heard it said that the fascination of a game, at once stimulating and restful, lies in its escape from the infinite. A game is pursued to an end ; life has no known end that one cares to contemplate.

Passing indoors, I do not know how better to explain the respectable addiction to bridge except by this temporary loss of the self in a set of finite rules governing a futile pastime. Yet more powerful than the instinct of escape may be the lure of chance. In the serious, acquisitive aspect this becomes gambling which, at its worst on the greyhound track and on the football field,

may be a ruinous vice ; in the mildest form, which affects us all, there is the uncertain appeal of Fortuna. Taken together, these forms of amusement put a particular emphasis upon a national habit ; but, perhaps, no country is quite peculiar : the difference becomes one of degree. Anyhow, the last quality distinguishing the English habit is the deep-rooted urge to keep closely in touch with the earth.

We Indians have most of the sports that are practised in England, but their diffusion is far less complete. The village cricket team, following its rules as religiously as the great sportsmen at Lord's, watched with equal keenness, though by a smaller circle, is not to be seen in India. There, sport is more peculiarly privileged : from polo, which is native to the soil, to chess, which was invented in India, the practice of these games is aristocratic in the strict sense that they are played only by the propertied and leisured classes. Among the masses, they are unknown—a vast lack in the national life. The village has no common ground with the palace or the bungalow ; and no doubt the palace is only farther removed from its remote dependants by the fine elaboration of such a game as chess into philosophic significance. Chess, it may be pointed out, has a symbolism reflecting every aspiration of the mind.

Personally, I dream of the time when the free Indian world will have, as one expression of unity throughout the land, a village green in every community where some form of national game is played.

### VIII

### ART

THIS chapter, because of my own limitations, for I am not an art critic, is strictly a record of personal impressions. These will be as true as I can make them.



The Germans used to call England *das Land ohne Musik*. This is a slander. The simple fact is that where music has been cultivated, as in Wales and Yorkshire, there are both a passion for it and a marked capacity. It is not necessary to deny that Germans have excelled in this art, but that the English response to its appeal is very great cannot be denied by any impartial observer.

Now I am not a musician in any technical sense, but music is a powerful element, conscious and unconscious, in my emotions, as it is in so many others who are not experts in the subject. But I want to give some idea of musical influence in the life of India contrasted with music as it came to me in England.

Music was a part of the life of my home. A professional musician, of high accomplishment, played to us for a couple of hours every evening, and whenever a famous artist happened to pass our town he was expected to visit our house. I recall an evening when a celebrated sitar-player came to see us. His performance claimed the instructed admiration of my father and friends. As for me, I was in an almost literal sense enchanted, so that when my father touched me on the shoulder to rouse me from what seemed to him a doze, but was more like a trance condition, I woke up with a start. It was so delightful to be floating on a warm river that wound itself somewhere among the stars.

I have had similar and even more violent emotions while listening to Indian music.

European music, which I heard fairly early in Indian parks or in the houses of English residents, affected me differently. More noisy than the Indian, its rhythm and tempo roused me to an active mood, instead of a state of mind more peaceful and contemplative. European music, I said to myself, is the

expression of men of action—adventurers, explorers, and sometimes conquerors.

It didn't seem to touch my soul, but rather stimulated my feelings.

When I came to England I naturally tried to verify my impressions. Was there a special quality in the music exported to India?

I should say not, though the choice was certainly designed to strike the martial note. English music, so far as I have heard it here, has no general militant character. It is still a little too harsh for my ears, but its general quality is soothing. So at least I have found Elgar and those composers that have accidentally come under my notice. Their most common atmosphere is pastoral. Even Holst and Delius, in their characteristic compositions, strike the same note.

The English are eclectic, and one gets from them often the martial appeal of Wagner. Deeper than his harmonies, as well as those of most even of the best English composers, are the profound creations of Beethoven. Now there is more in this than the greatness of the German as he is known to the average European. My response was intense and peculiar. I was hardly surprised, therefore, to hear from more musically instructed friends that the blind master had been deeply influenced by the *Upanishads*. In him I heard the echo of a voice that has moulded my race.

English music is of the soil—natural to an emotionally poetic nation. It is dreamy, idealistic, aspiring, all a compound of mist and moonbeams, the life of birds, the voice of trees, and the whisper of the unseen.

To all this, too, I feel a native response. I am particularly fond of English madrigals, some of which are wonderful. They produce in me the same heartache as Indian songs.

My knowledge of Indian painting came late and, odd as it may seem, after I had seen a good deal of the work of European masters.

About 1933, Mr. Eric Partridge invited me to write an article on Indian art for a book he was editing upon the achievements of my country. I was suddenly confronted with my own ignorance of the subject in which I was assumed to be an initiate. I had little knowledge of Indian art or, to be more exact, little defined knowledge ; for I had the key, and I had received the atmosphere as I grew up from childhood to manhood. In producing the required contribution I had to search and awaken my unconscious mind. Now I found that the strongest pictorial influence that remained with me from my early life in India was the depiction of scenes as preserved in the frescoes in the cave-and-rock temples of Ajanta.

There, coming from monks who lived with their eyes uplifted to a world beyond the grave, were painted beings reflecting the flowering of passionate life more vividly than anything I have since seen in European art. Yet there was no grossness ; for, in spite of the beauty of earth, the sense of a spiritual world predominated.

That stereoscopic vision I have not seen in the same degree even in the work of the Italian masters.

English painting, like English music, mirrors on the whole the idyllic life of the countryside and the people in the midst of their joys and, to a lesser extent, their griefs. The resultant impression is the charm of a northern summer night, in which the glimmer of twilight gives place only to the gleam of morning.

English painting seems to me lacking in power, perhaps because it inclines too much to the genre school and has too little of pure imagination. It depicts the actual with fidelity, but rarely strives to produce a state of soul. Here the French have given me greater

satisfaction. Why? The answer may throw some further light on English painting.

French artists, especially those of modern times, it is said, are almost exclusively attracted by what is ugly. What does this mean?

The question of the beauty of forms, apart from the fact that there are no absolute standards of judgment, confronts every great artist. He has to establish a harmony between personal and racial vision. Here the case of Rouault is instructive. He did not deny that the search for formal beauty had to be sacrificed to the quest for oddity of pictorial matter as well as to the need to free painting, as far as possible, from the pattern imposed by nature. Thus artists like Cézanne, Rousseau, and Rouault had come to make beauty out of "deformations" and out of "ugliness", owing to the extreme sensitivity of an art which had reached the height of self-consciousness, and to the sovereign power of poetry—that vital and vitalizing seed having more or less disappeared from the regular forms of every academic school.

Given the point reached by the painter's art with the classicism of Ingres and the romanticism of Delacroix, a total change had to take place. Such was the considered opinion of Rouault. In this connection such an evolution as Picasso's seems to be revealing; he began with forms that an English academician of the most orthodox kind might approve, and then moved on towards a more accentuated deformation and a maximum break with the data of nature. Rouault's development, it appears, took an opposite turn.

We can grant to Léon Bloy that not only Rouault but all artists—painters, sculptors, musicians, poets—have for some time felt the appeal of ugliness. What is the real cause of this attraction? An incidental source of inspiration for these spirits is no doubt the need for the

stimulation of new and difficult subjects. The artist is essentially an adventurer, and his evocations of beauty at their best are never obvious. But the deeper influence is a sense of chaos within and without, and of a chaos to come. The Dance of Siva, in its negative aspect (that of destruction), seems to me to have bewitched many Continental artists. This is not a mere eccentricity ; it is an awareness of a larger reality. It is chaos, Nietzsche has said, that gives birth to a dancing star.

With some exceptions, and among these I would mention Edward Burra, who seems to me the most gifted of living English painters, the artists of England are seraphically free from the taint of these disturbing philosophical considerations. They continue to paint with their emotions. I like their atmospheric effects, which can sometimes be enchanting.

What little I have to say about English sculpture is bound to jar upon many ; but I remain convinced beyond all doubt that the whole Western world, ancient or modern, has nothing in this domain that may be compared with the masterpieces of India.

Modern Europe, with an exception here and there, is under the spell of Greek art, which is the best it knows and, inevitably, it judges Indian achievement by its own models. In order to see Indian sculpture free from classic European prejudice, it would be necessary to spend a few lustres in the environment of the Indian temples. There, as I have noted again and again, beauty glows like the star-lit firmament and fills one with immortal longings.

Epstein is the best sculptor that modern England has produced. I like his early intimate busts ; from a few of them the spirit bursts irresistibly. His later creations are mud that a tide-like soul has rutted, which are stiffened and have lost in crispness.

Dora Gordine is excellent : some of her figures leap into life ; others have the grace of a lily. But she is caviare to the general public. A pity.

However, both these artists are un-English ; nearer, indeed, to the Orient.

England has produced some master-builders—Wren, the Adam brothers, and some others ; but English architecture, taken in the bulk, does not impress me. I remember seeing Buckingham Palace for the first time. I was shocked. I thought I was looking at a penitentiary or a glorified barracks.

Indian palaces are in comparison homes made for fairies. I could give a hundred examples that would put Versailles to shame. Try to see a palace in Rajputana. The immense structure seems to float in the air, while the parapet circles it like the undulations of a mighty wave. Within, each room has its special character corresponding to its function. The *salon* is sparsely but selectively furnished, leaving the whole outline of the room to form its atmosphere. In the room there is the animation of intercourse. Pass to the dining-room, and you are invited to recline luxuriously on cushions, chairs and tables being reserved for more formal occasions. The bedrooms have a soporific quality : the lighting is soft, the colour scheme soothing, and the open windows bring in the perfume of night-opening flowers. Here you have the privacy of privacy : the hours drop like petals from the bowl of Time.

There are no sacred fanes in England that have the grandeur of many to be found in all parts of India. Even Durham Cathedral, though it has majesty, has not the glory of the Sun-Temple of Konarak. Nor can Chartres even approach the graciousness of the temple at Deogarh.

For burial places, nothing can surpass India. The

Taj Mahal is only the loveliest pearl among many. Yet, personally, I bow to the natural power of the Druidic remains, especially in the setting which seems to join them to the features of the landscape around them. They are, I think, more than the work of genius ; I can only attribute them to pure inspiration. They remind me of Buddhist monasteries and mounds of the dead.

Suburban England, with its villas resembling peas in a pod, is a distressing sight. The French and the Swiss show better taste in this matter. Some of the cottages I have seen in Normandy are adorable.

But the country houses of England are magnificent. They star the land with emblems of beauty. To choose between them is difficult ; each has its particular appeal. Lord Cornwallis's mansion in Kent, near the village of Loose, has a beauty of outline that I cannot forget. The immense structure appears to rise from its verdant base like a huge white bird with wings outstretched.

Cliveden House, prominent on its great Italian terrace on the brow of the hill, has a charm all its own. And, of course, it stands in ideal surroundings.

But it is hopeless to describe the many lovely country houses of England. I have seen a few, and am deeply impressed by their individual character. Indeed, they are in many ways the richest expression of the privileged life of England.

I have a partiality for medieval churches and century-old cottages. I remember seeing a little Gothic church somewhere in Kent : it was so beautiful in its outline and soft colouring, as well as in its setting, that it has for me the enchantment of a dream.

English architecture is at its best when it is least pretentious.

*LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE*

"To master a language," said A. E., "one must acquire it in the cradle. The crooning of the mother, the humming or whistling of the father, the merry voices of children at play, the singing of the kettle as it boils, the tinkling of cups and saucers, the note of a bird—all these create their own melody and affect the ear in a hundred ways."

"Quite so," said Sturge Moore, who rarely agreed with anyone. "There are things that cannot be learned from books or teachers; they are absorbed unconsciously and breathe in our blood. Yeats told me the other day that the sounds he heard in childhood had a considerable influence on the feeling-rhythm of his poetry. I can well believe it. I must have been a toddler when I first became conscious of the song of the robin; but all my life I have been trying to reproduce—vainly I fear, the magic of that tender soloist of the dancing leaf."

"No doubt early influences are important," said Roger Ingpen, the expert on Shelley, "but think of Joseph Conrad. So far as I know, he did not learn our language in the nursery; yet he used it with power."

"Conrad is too florid for my taste," broke in Sturge Moore. "He never deals with the caressing little-nesses of life which contain so much of the woeful heart of things. He concentrates on the immensities, for which bookish language will do."

Something made me mention George Santayana.

"Santayana," took up A. E., "goes round and round without getting anywhere. A most disappointing writer. And his prose is stiff in the joints. I feel, as I read it, that the sentences might at any moment fly



apart. Consider, on the other hand, Shaw. How flexible is his style ! Bend it, twist it, but you cannot break it."

"That's perfectly true," said Sturge Moore, "yet Shaw has his defects. He is too clear to be profound. He sees the end of a sentence before he begins. Light, too much light, is his bane. I am inclined to agree with Chapman that no pen can anything eternal write that is not steeped in the humour of the night."

"Well, this is a defence of the cryptic poets," laughed A.E. "I must say that I am a little surprised . . ."

And so the discussion continued, embracing many writers, living and dead. I recall it to-day (with the aid of my journal), and am suddenly seized with apprehension. Am I qualified to write about the English tongue ?

I wonder. I learned it not in infancy, but at the age of thirteen, and that also from British, American, and Goanese Fathers. So my limitations are perfectly clear. Personally, I am only too conscious of them. Still, I have always loved English, and was thrilled when I realized that I was making it my own. It comes to me almost without effort, and seems the most fitting medium of my thoughts and feelings. In fact, I preferred it to French when I took up the career of an author. Why ? Because I felt that I could move about in it with greater ease and assurance. Anyhow, one can't write several books in English without learning some of its finer points. And then I happen to know some other languages, European and Indian, and this knowledge allows me to look at English comparatively and, as it were, from the outside.

Well, here is what I think of the English language, after wrestling with it for more than twenty years.

English is at once the easiest and the most difficult

of languages. Easiest, because one can acquire a certain proficiency in it without the aid of grammar. A fine ear and a delicate perception carry one pretty far. This is less possible in French, where only the greatest masters can ignore the rules, and that also at their peril. English is most difficult because it is fluid and perpetually expanding. I can think of no writing in prose or verse which it would be completely safe to take as a model. It is always possible to draw further music from the language.

To write English well is not easy ; to write it creatively is a formidable task, which not many have performed.

Thomas Hardy, as George Moore has reminded us, handled English clumsily ; and H. G. Wells often indulged in Babuisms. Galsworthy never went beyond a limited mastery. Arnold Bennett had no idea of texture. The other day Mr. Edward Shanks wrote : " At about four o'clock . . . " Surely " at " or " about " by itself is quite enough. H. G. Massingham, who is known to be a fine craftsman, uses the word " nostalgia " in a manner that would have made Father Boswin, the Principal of my school at Karachi, scream. One could go on indefinitely, but what is the use ?

French writers never make mistakes in their own language ; the most commonplace of them write it at least correctly. When they use English, however, they generally go wrong. Here is a startling example. Emile Legouis was good enough to supply a preface for one of my earlier books. I translated this into English and submitted it to him. He made two or three corrections in my version, and all these were stylistic errors ! Here is a sample. I had written : " India, mother of wisdom and philosophy, cradle of an immemorial civilization." He inserted before " mother " and " cradle " the

indicative article. He was only correct according to the French rule. High authority agrees with me in leaving out the article.

How about the other classes in England? What is their knowledge of their own language? Exceptions apart, not so good as it might be. Again and again I have received letters that make me smile. Listen to a graduate from Oxford: "I have seized to be pestered with mundane matters." Here is what an army officer wrote to me: "Gandy (Gandhi) has a bee in his bonnet; someone ought to have grabbed it and squashed it in the bud." Now hear a distinguished lady: "It never rains but pours."

Yes, it is difficult to write English with idiomatic ease and nervous precision. Bad teaching may have something to do with it, but not much. English either comes to one or not at all.

Personally, when I write in a half-dreamy state I do fairly well. The moment I reflect—that is, hesitate over a word or phrase—I am lost. I have to adopt a different method in French: there, I have to be mentally alert. Making allowances for personal idiosyncrasy, I should say that English is best written with the temperament. One must have an æsthetic feeling, natural or acquired, for the ethos and aroma of the language. Some knowledge of its "bones", of course, helps.

I shall say nothing of English spelling: it defies everyone at some time or another. Yeats-Brown, in a letter to me, spelt the verb "envelop" with an "e"; and so did Edward Garnett. Sturge Moore's correspondence, as his friends know, is honeycombed with spelling mistakes.

Concerning English pronunciation, it is more obscure than the Theory of Relativity. Names of persons and places are a matter of hit-and-miss with the best

informed. Personally, I am resigned to be generally wrong. Once I was introduced to a man called Marshbanks, but when he gave me his visiting card his name was written quite differently. Everyone will call to mind such hurdles ; they are endless. Even simple words like " civilization " are pronounced in two ways, both correct !

But to come to the characteristics of the English language. Here, to achieve some clarity, I am obliged to follow a slightly zigzag course.

It must be remembered that the English are very proud of their language and attribute many mystical virtues to it. They call it a particular glory of their blood and State ; they even think that the Commonwealth is held together, and the friendship of America assured, because of a common tongue. Cynics say that this is a pleasant form of delusion. I don't think so ; no surgery can separate thought from language. They are interdependent.

Nehru is believed to be an opponent of this country. In a superficial sense this is true ; yet he has—as Gandhi was the first to recognize—the mind of an Englishman. How can it be otherwise ? Is not his chosen medium of expression English ? The language we use does affect our mental processes. Max Müller was very sure of this.

Now, to my thinking, there is an " it " about most languages. By this I mean that each of them has an undertone which, like a violin, conserves its temper through all changes. Such is not the case with English.

A glance at its history reveals its peculiarity. English, as we know, did not exist before the Norman Conquest. It came into being in this way. " What *did* happen," says Belloc, " was the somewhat sudden permeation, after the pestilence, of the Upper speech by the Lower,

and their amalgam in the form we use to-day and call the English language."

This is a ponderous way of saying that English is the result of "the Norman yeast working on the Anglo-Saxon home-baked loaf".

Then there was the great influence of the Renaissance upon English. Many words were borrowed from Latin and Greek, not through French, but directly. At the time of Queen Elizabeth, English attained a remarkable verbal flexibility which distinguishes it to-day from the other European languages. Here is an example. A word, originally one single part of speech, may be used as any other part of speech (e.g. *clean*, at first an adjective, is an adverb in *clean gone*, a verb in *to clean*, and a noun in *to have a clean*). And many writers after 1600, especially the playwrights, enriched English with words of their own coinage. In the eighteenth century more words were borrowed from the French (anachronism, anecdote, decadence, to mention but a few) and from the Italian (opera, soprano, piano, tenor, and so on and so forth). In the nineteenth century and after, the growth of science and philosophy led to many more words being formed from Latin and Greek, such as telephone, locomotive, aeroplane, psychology, dogma, cinema, aviator—the list is long. Oriental languages, especially Sanskrit, Arabic, and Hindustani, have contributed their share to the enrichment of English.

From all this one thing is absolutely clear: that English is a very mixed language. It has tones and voices but, at least to my ear, no fundamental note.

English can be dull, banal, inept; it can also be subtle, grave, majestic. It all depends on who is using it. One receives little support from the language itself; whether one likes it or not one betrays oneself in English.

Take, for instance, Shakespeare, who is said to be the most objective of writers. Well, he may or may not share the opinions of his characters, but he does reveal himself in the language they use. Above and beyond the words of Lear, Othello, or Prospero we hear the voice of Shakespeare, which cannot be mistaken. It has a ring of its own.

This applies to everybody who uses English. The tones of Wordsworth are different from the tones of Coleridge or Shelley.

No doubt this is true of other languages too, but to a lesser degree, I think. In the English language forms are less fixed than in French, German, or Italian. Inflexions, for instance, have more or less disappeared ; many relations expressed grammatically elsewhere are conveyed in English only through the tone of the voice ; there are surprisingly few hard-and-fast rules concerning the sequence of words in a clause or clauses in a sentence ; the language contains a very high proportion of monosyllables. The result of this is that English expresses very directly the peculiarity of the person who employs it.

But I need not labour this point. The English language, because of its loosened structure, allows a writer or speaker to mould it in keeping with the pulsations of his own being. If a man is empty, he pours out his emptiness ; if he is a sage, he scatters jewels of wisdom. English is pitiless : it displays one as one is. It is the mirror of the soul. The English know this, and behave accordingly. They speak little, or allusively, and say not a word about those things that puzzle or intrigue foreigners. Each one seems to surround his spirit with an oceanic silence.

The chief characteristic of modern English is not elegance or melliflousness, but terseness and vigour, which make it the most suitable language for business

purposes. Here, America has made a notable contribution. She has supplied English with many sharp, crisp phrases and words. She has also simplified the already simple English grammar and improved the archaic and unphonetic spelling. These are gains.

Another quality of English which renders it capable of high poetic expression is its wealth of synonyms, arising out of the two basic languages, Teutonic and Latin, that build up its vocabulary. By means of these synonyms English can differentiate, more than any other European tongue, between the emotional and the intellectual idea.

In fact, English owes to the Latin languages its sonority, its flexibility, and its gravity ; to the Saxon dialects it is indebted for its practicality, its matter-of-factness, and even its downright earthiness.

English is, then, an organ with all the keys and stops.

Has it any defects ? In an ancient book on John Bull's Other Island the writer has a chapter headed "Snakes in Ireland". He fills this by saying : "There aren't any." Where are the defects in English ?

I have heard French friends say that English has not the precision of their language. I don't know ; English can express almost everything not only accurately but also snappily. But the English don't like calling a poker a poker. They prefer euphemisms. This has its drawbacks. "The realism of Zola and Flaubert," says Dr. Inge, "appears more unclean in English than in French" ; and he goes on to suggest that this is because the English language is a language of prudery and varnish.

English, it is said, has not the clarity of Greek or French. Now clarity is a fine quality, but it is not everything. It is useless when we wish to make the journey to the Inferno or the Paradiso. For that a certain perfumed darkness is essential.

An Indian scholar tells me that English is somewhat weak in nuances. "Here is one example among many," he says. "The English have only one word for love. They love wife, mother, friend, country, God. Sanskrit distinguishes between these different kinds of love."

Now I come to what might be called a lacuna in English. There are no words to express the states of the soul or the deeper experiences of the human spirit. It is almost impossible to translate into English such terms as Dharma, Rajas, Tamas, Sattva, Goona, Samsara, Nirvana, Mukti, or even Maya. Approximations there are, but they are more misleading than enlightening.

The English might retort that if they lack words to express the subtler states of the soul, they have given the world a stronger instrument for the incarnation of life and movement. Whoever plays football or cricket, be they Russians or Red Indians, must speak of "goals" and "penalties" and "runs" and "wickets".

An English friend reminds me that it is impossible to understand the inwardness of English literature without taking into account the influence of the Bible on it. This is true. The *Authorized Version*, for instance, has had a great effect upon the thought and speech of the English people. Yet I feel that the Bible, with its easy rhythms, has retarded the growth of the English language. It has tended to crystallize forms. Now, if I understand the matter rightly, the genius of the English language lies in its capacity for perpetual renovation. It was Molièresque before Molière: "Je prends mon bien où je le trouve."

The English language, all said and done, is a marvellous instrument of expression, capable of taking into its orbit the tiniest grain of sand and the flaming ramparts of the world.

And, let us not forget, its music is half its meaning or more.



As an undergraduate, I read a fearful lot—French books, German books, Russian books, Chinese books, Persian books—all these and many more I devoured (in translations, of course) ; but it was English literature (barring the Anglo-Saxon stuff) that stirred me most deeply.

Why ? Because there was nothing in it that seemed alien to my spirit. On the contrary, I found in it a virility that answered to the call of my own soul. The home valuations of existence, I confess, stifled me—so puny and cramping did they seem ! (Of their inwardness, of course, I knew nothing.) I drank deeply, avidly, at the springs of English thought and feeling, and came to realize with a kind of regretful resentment that the culture of my own country had left untasted many wells of life and beauty and joy. I said to myself that I would steep myself in each one of them—nay, I would plunge into the sources and become one with the sources. Then—but why describe the mad dreams of youth ?

It was the virility of English literature, I have said, that appealed to me most. But what do I mean by this ?

The English, if one judged them by their books, masterpieces or pot-boilers, loved life passionately. Existence seemed to them a gift that must be received at the hands of fate on bended knee. To waste a life—that was the supreme crime. Every moment was precious, indeed, sacramental. To crowd eternity in an hour was glorious. What a pity that we were endowed with a limited mortality. That was what made the English sad.

An un-oriental attitude, to be sure ; but I approved of it instinctively. I also realized that it was shared by all Western nations. Did I say Western ? Why, there is a character in one of Dostoievsky's books who says

that he would be content to cling for all eternity to a bit of rock above a yawning precipice so long as he was allowed to live. This seemed to me at once horrible and marvellous. *Quelle soif de vivre !*

The Japanese, too, cherished existence. Wasn't the cherry blossom their national emblem? I greatly admired these lines

Old age is not a friend I wish to meet ;  
And if some day to see me he should come,  
I'd lock the door as he walk'd up the street,  
And cry, " Most honour'd Sir ! I'm not at home."

Most English, I believe, would echo these words. It was Havelock Ellis who said to me : " One can't help getting aged, but it is a disgrace to grow old." And it was Sir Harry Lauder who remarked to a friend in my presence : " If I can reach eighty, I shall manage to live up to a hundred and five." I had never heard an Indian talk like that. The Vedic poets, when I discovered them, gave me transports of joy : they were, I felt, men after my own heart ; they thought it a miracle to be merely alive. How fine ! But I shall return to this topic later on.

The English do not merely love life : they face it bravely. So, I am bound to say, do some other active races. What, then, is the difference ?

There is a keener edge to the French, the Spanish, and the Japanese *amor vite*. This often degenerates into frenzy. Exceptions apart, the English savour life with a quiet ecstasy. They have neither *les grands passionés* nor *les grands damnés*. Their way is akin to the child's.

Now the point of view of the child has not yet tintured our philosophy. A pity. We have much to learn from it.

The child, to quote from a book of mine, is fundamentally active, and his activity is always purposive.

When we say "purposive", we mean that it serves some end, whether the child is conscious of that end or not. This leads to the consideration that the young organism responds automatically to the call of its needs. Is it a far-fetched fancy that there is a pre-established harmony between the young organism and its environment? For myself, I think not. I should rather say that it is our so-called culture that introduces discord. It might well be called the Ate of the human drama. Intellect is verily the beguiler; it detracts from the divine simplicity of reality.

Anyhow, the child reacts to the universe quite differently from the sophisticated adult. The intrinsic difference is nothing but absolute trust in the reality of things as they appear and an outgoing faith that covers all things. Jesus' declaration that the adults can enter the Kingdom of Heaven—the Kingdom of Absolute Reality—only by becoming as little children, receives its meaning and its truth just by such interpretation.

The other and parallel path of reconciliation is the way of the mystic, who would claim his way as that of the "twice-born".

The English achieve the same results as the mystics do by remaining child-like. These are perhaps dark and mysterious words. I hasten to explain.

There is a note of innocence about English literature that I find nowhere else except, once more, in the Vedic hymns. Take, to begin with, Shelley's *The Cloud*; there hangs about the poem the aroma of the springtide of the world. Now take Blake's *Infant Joy*

"I have no name;  
I am but two days old."  
—What shall I call thee?  
"I happy am;  
Joy is my name."  
—Sweet joy befall thee!

Pretty joy !  
Sweet joy, but two days old ;  
Sweet joy I call thee :  
Thou dost smile :  
I sing the while,  
Sweet joy befall thee !

What is there about this little poem that so clutches at the heart ?

Shakespeare, too, after the rage and fury of the great tragedies, turned to innocence—to magic and moonlight and the charmed world of the little people. That seemed to him paradisaal.

He who has listened to the prattle of little people will have noticed their love of the meaningless. They will go on saying for hours what seems to us adults a mere collocation of words. We find the same thing among the English poets. Nonsense verse is quite a department of English literature. Bottom's lines in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are probably the first example of the genre. Then there is Charles Lamb, a master of nonsense. Come Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll. Their nonsense poetry is famous. It was Thomas Whittaker, the Neo-Platonist scholar, who read to me, with great appreciation, some nonsense songs that he had collected from little-known poets. Later, going through the work of Kipling, Belloc, Chesterton, and de la Mare, I noticed that they were all nonsense-addicts.

What does this prove ? That the English, like the child, indulge in the twittering of sparrows. This is to say that they express what they must. A rhythmic utterance of the heart, whether it has sense or not, is somehow in tune with the rhythm that runs through all things.

The ridiculous is sometimes the shortest cut to the cosmic. The English understand that.

They also feel, what I think I have already suggested, that there is only a nominal difference between what *is* and what *so subsists*. Mere appearance has no meaning for them. Matter and spirit, in their opinion, are inter-linked.

This brings me to the English attitude to nature. It is *sui generis*.

The German is constitutionally speculative and sees the world, if I may say all that I feel, through the wrong end of a telescope. The Frenchman, being by nature orderly (I don't say logical), reduced everything to a dust of fixities. That is to say, he likes patterns, and the very thought of the chaotic or eccentric frightens him. He loves the coherent and what can be labelled. Molière's *L'Avare*, for example, is not this or that particular miser, but miserliness as it might exist in some ideal Gehenna. Such is not Shakespeare's way. He deals with individual destinies.

This or that person, not a racial type, is the subject-matter of English literature. This is so because the English have been well inspired. They have been, it seems, Relativists before Relativity. They know, in some dim, obscure way, that every mortal who feels and thinks is himself the absolute, and not the relative, centre of the universe. In fact, there is no cosmos common to all observers and private to none.

Perhaps this accounts for the individual note in English literature. From Chaucer to Chesterton and beyond there is no racial wisdom or collective vision, but personal denials and affirmations. This characteristic reaches its delightful best in the Victorian age, when almost every great man hawked some particular panacea. For Newman the one thing needful was to submit to authority and enter the Roman fold. Carlyle thought the best that could be done for a man was to find him a master and set him to work. For Mill,

the key to happiness was free logical discussion in the interests of humanity. The scientists held that we must follow truth wherever it led. Arnold maintained that none of these things was of importance in comparison with the ability to recognize "the grand style", no matter where found. Rot ! said Thackeray, we are all infected with snobbery. Not action, but character, boomed Browning, is what counts. Meredith's idea was that men should laugh and be laughed at unto their soul's salvation.

The discordant voices have multiplied in the twentieth century. Each crusader (think of G. K. Chesterton, Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Gerald Heard, and Aldous Huxley) points to a different star.

I suppose it is knowledge of this fact that makes T. S. Eliot say that there is no tradition in English literature. Virgil, now. He expressed, good man, the best thought of his day. Dante did the same. As for French writers, they experiment, but along a straight line. English authors, on the other hand, strike out paths of their own and are never satisfied until they have created private worlds.

What appears to Eliot a lack in English literature seems to me—and I say this in all diffidence—its strong point. The world being infinite, so at least modern science tells us, it needs an infinity of view-points to understand it.

It is true that no Englishman, not even Shakespeare, exhausts the compass of the English spirit ; but this does not mean that we get merely a chaos of suggestions from English artists. No, the English world, as revealed in its literature, is finite but unbounded. Many creative spirits seem to meet, as it were, *à rebours*. Indeed, the astonishing thing is that the visions of the poets and the realities of the scientists are almost parallel. Perhaps a word might be said about this.

The idea of evolution, as formulated by Darwin, first stirred it seems, in the minds of the poets. Shelley, Browning, and Tennyson open the door to science. They give here and there in their work a clear conception of evolution as distinct from the then current idea of spasmodic and special creations.

The second act of *Prometheus Unbound* is startling ; it is shot with prophetic musings. We read

ASIA. What is it with thee, sister ? Thou art pale.

PAN. How art thou changed ! I dare not look on thee ;  
I feel but see not. I scarce endure  
The radiance of thy beauty. Some good change  
Is working in the elements, which suffer  
Thy presence thus unveiled. The Nereids tell  
That on the day when the clear hyaline  
Was cloven at thy uprise, and thou didst stand  
Within a veined shell, which floated on  
Over the calm floor of the crystal sea,  
Among the Aegean isles, and by the shores  
Which bear thy name ; love, like the atmosphere  
Of the sun's fire filling the living world,  
Burst from thee, and illumined earth and heaven  
And the deep ocean and the sunless caves,  
And all that dwells within them : till grief cast  
Eclipse upon the soul from which it came :  
Such art thou now ; nor is it alone,  
Thy sister, thy companion, thine own chosen one,  
But the whole world which seeks thy sympathy.  
Hearest thou not sounds in the air which speak the love  
Of all articulate beings ? Feelest thou not  
The inanimate winds enamoured of thee ? List !

Here and elsewhere we have a creative vision, going beyond Hegel and directly relating to Darwinism, and speaking of the torpid universe being slowly filled with light, life, and love. The celestial dialogue between earth and moon, in the stupendous fourth act, renders with matchless art and majesty the grandeur of the cosmic scheme and succeeds, beyond any other

European poem, in giving a voice and a meaning to pure inorganic Being. With an exultant note earth predicts the triumph of science

And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,  
Heaven, hast thou secrets ? Man unveils me ; I have none.

Browning is more explicit. He says in *Paracelsus* (the passage has been cited again and again)

The centre-fire heaves underneath the earth,  
And the earth changes like a human face.

... Thus God dwells in all,  
From life's minute beginnings, up at last  
To man, the consummation of the scheme  
Of being, the completion of this sphere  
Of life : whose attributes had here and there  
Been scattered o'er the visible world before,  
Asking to be combined—dim fragments meant  
To be united in some wondrous whole,  
Imperfect qualities throughout creation,  
Suggesting some one creature yet to make—  
Some point where all those scattered layers should meet,  
Convergent in the faculties of man.

Tennyson has given us the Darwinian conception in its fullness in his *In Memoriam*. This poem is so well known that quotations from it seem to me superfluous.

The English believe that man is the centre of the universe. All things flow from him and for him. We Asiatics have some difficulty in understanding this. Our greatest spirits have told us that man is a part of nature, no more important than the insect of an hour. True science would seem to confirm this view. But the English are convinced that man is the crown and glory of the creative process. Indeed, he is the only reality that ultimately matters ; the universe itself contemplates itself through his eyes.

This attitude is not shared by the French. Montaigne thought that man was ephemeral, while Nature alone was permanent. Shakespeare does not agree : he



seems to believe that nature is a fiction and that man is the only fact of facts. Recall the lines in *The Tempest*

And like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And like an unsubstantial pageant faded  
Leave not a wrack behind . . .

In this cosmic reverie we have Shakespeare's secret thought, which is also the thought of his countrymen. But the poet has no illusions.

In play after play he tells us that it is absurd to try to play always a principal rôle. It is a folly to fight one's destiny.

Sometimes a larger, environing Presence is so evident, so terrible, so imperceptibly active, that it excludes man from his own life. This awareness may last an instant, an hour, or a day ; but whatever may be its duration it produces a transfiguration. And then one is not the same ; one is free—and one is judged !

Here begins the real tragedy of man. Sudden visions come in the midst of violent action. Then follow fearful awakenings of conscience. Macbeth knows this state. When his purpose is shaken by the horror of the deed he resorts to contemplation ; Lady Macbeth tells him that the sleeping and the dead are but as pictures (an almost Indian sophism) ; and to our minds nothing is more strange than the tone in which Macbeth, hemmed in by his foes and hopelessly at bay, falls suddenly to musing upon to-morrow and yesterday, and reflects that life is, after all, full of sound and fury signifying nothing. These touches of mystery, these half-veiled hints, these trial sketches of a larger life burst in upon the vision of his heroes in the hour of crisis and shake them to their foundations. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Of course, it is only with a light

touch that Shakespeare produces these chords after the silences that follow the full volume of violent action. But these chords do convey to us, if we have ears to hear, the quality of his music.

In Æschylus, a doctrinaire poet, the idea of a divine design running through all things is expressed. Not so in Shakespeare. He is more in tune with Sophocles—that is, he is sceptical.

Shakespeare did not believe in immortality ; neither did he, like Lucretius, affirm utter annihilation. His attitude is best given in the line

Death being dead, there is no more dying then.

Here we have an idea of a certain kind of immortality. Of what kind ? We are told that there is something that remains.

We are at once reminded of Spinoza's " eternity of the mind ". And we may go further and relate this to Euripides' thought (as elaborated in *Helena*)

The mind of the dead lives not,  
But falling into the immortal ether, retains  
An immortal thought.

This is the conclusion which Euripides seems to have reached after much meditation. It has a personal ring about it.

Now, is the parallelism between Shakespeare and the Greek poet due to copying ? Certainly not. These great spirits brooded over the problem of immortality and decided as to what they could accept as the minimum !

But there is no end to what I could say about Shakespeare. Indeed, I shall be returning to him again and again. For this I make no apology : English achievement would not be English achievement without Shakespeare. He stands in my path like a huge colossus, about whose legs other writers dance and sing

or merely creep, not to find themselves dishonourable graves, but modest ones.

English writers, however much they may differ from one another, all, or almost all, show a loving awareness of the earth. Of its beauty they have sung in thrilling accents. Here is the first lovely lisp of the race

I sing of a maiden  
That is makelës,  
King of kingës,  
To her sone sche ches.

He cam also stillë  
There his moder was,  
As dew in Aprillë  
That falleth on the grass.

Langland, though in thought and language he belongs to the old Anglo-Saxon world, is still an Englishman. He begins his *Vision of Piers the Plowman* thus

On a summer's morning when soft was the sun,  
I shope me in shrowdes as I a shepe were  
Or elles an hermite unholy of workes.

Chaucer, in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, breathes a spirit that his countrymen recognize and take for granted as purely English

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote  
The droghte of March hath perced to the rote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour . . .

But I need not continue ; I have quoted the entire passage elsewhere in this book. The point is that English poets, with rare exceptions, love the terrene scheme and do not doubt its reality. The Mayatheory, which plays so large a part in Indian purview, does not disturb them in the least. Is this a matter of greater density (I am using the word in its best sense) ? Perhaps physical constitution, food, and psychic influx

have something to do with it ; yet there is no doubt that in a country where the linking of light and darkness is almost constant, where everything is gentle and grey, and where all things end in compromise, it is difficult to ride on a sunbeam and disappear into the sources of light and warmth. Nevertheless, there is Shakespeare who, as we have seen, envisaged the world as a shadow-show. Then there is Wordsworth. He told his nephew concerning his famous *Immortality Ode* : “ I was often unable to think of external things as having existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from me but inherent in my own immaterial nature. Many times, going to school, I have grasped a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to reality.” Edward Thompson said, a year or two before his death, in a voice that carried absolute conviction : “ I often feel that everything floats as in a mist. Perhaps you Hindus are right : life is a dream within a dream.”

However, the vast majority of English writers accept the world as real and describe its various aspects with all the art at their disposal. But I think they are at their best when they talk of nature, especially green nature. Its benediction breathes upon their pages and creates a delicate “ duft ” of its own. One exception though, the eighteenth century, which always makes me feel uncomfortable because of its hot-house atmosphere. But here too there are some white-winged butterflies—James Thomson and Collins, for example. The latter’s *Ode to Evening* is exquisite ; the meaning of the poem is perfectly geared to its music, which reaches its culmination in the stanza

Now air is hush’d, save where the weak-eyed bat  
With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,  
Or where the beetle winds  
His small but sullen horn.

English writers, we have seen, seldom speak of man in the abstract ; they particularize. It is the same when they deal with nature. How many of them have written about this or that flower? There is, for instance, Chaucer's daisy, Wordsworth's daisy, Francis Thompson's daisy, and goodness alone knows how many other daisies.

English writers follow the methods of the scientist : they go from the parts to the whole. Tennyson's *Flower in the Crannied Wall* expresses the mood of the race : if we could know one thing perfectly, we would know all.

Hence the minute and loving care with which English writers study bird and beast and blossom. Take for instance Matthew Arnold. His poetry has not " the deep, authentic mountain thrill " : we have to admit that his feeling for nature has not Wordsworth's depth : but so far as it goes it is genuine enough. Lines such as

While the deep-burnished foliage overhead  
Splintered the silver arrows of the moon

owe more to the felicity of phrasing than to real emotion. Yet no one can think of Arnold's poetry as a whole without acknowledging that nature is always behind it as a living background—whether it be the storm wind and rain shaking Tintagel

I forgot thou comest from thy voyage—  
Yes, the spray is upon thy cloak and hair . . .

It is these touches, as of vernal showers, that make English writing so attractive. Of course, in describing this or that object or phenomenon the English achieve astonishing effects ; but here the French do even better. They have a sharper eye ; where the English poet feels and suggests the French defines and describes, in

the precise word and the exact image. This is how a sonnet of Ronsard's begins

Comme on void sur la branche au mois de May la rose  
En sa belle jeunesse, en sa premier fleur,  
Rendre le ciel jaloux de sa vive couleur,  
Quand l'aube de ses pleurs au point du jour l'arrose :

La grace dans sa feuille, et l'amour se repose,  
Embaumant les jardins et les arbres d'odeur :  
Mais battue ou de pluye ou d'excessive ardeur,  
Languissante elle meurt feuille à feuille décroise.

And here is a sample from Baudelaire

Grands bois, vous m'effrayez comme des cathedrales ;  
Vous hurlez comme l'orgue ; et dans nos coeurs maudits,  
Chambres d'éternel deuil ou vibrent de vieux râles,  
Répondent les échos de vos *De Profundis*.

The words, once read, cannot be forgotten. Now listen to this

Voici le soir charmant, ami du criminel ;  
Il vient comme un complice, à pas de loup ;—le ciel  
Se ferme lentement comme une grande alcôve,  
Et l'homme impatient se change en bête fauve.

French poetry at its best reflects as in a mirror the self and the not-self. English poetry, though it can convey the colour of human experience and the sheen of reality, prefers dim outlines and the visionary gleam. It gives us in its higher flights

The light that never was on sea or land,  
The consecration and the poet's dream.

That is to say, the English poet is not satisfied with embalming the multitudinous aspects of the totality that lies spread before him. He tries to understand everything from within. By the path of passionate disinterestedness he achieves miracles. This is what I have in mind

What heart could have thought you ?  
Past our devisal  
(O filigree petal)  
Fashioned so purely,  
Fragilely, surely,  
From what Paradisal  
Imageless metal,  
Too costly for cost ?  
Who hammered you, wrought you—  
From argentine vapour ?—  
God was my shaper.  
Passing surmisal,  
He hammered, He wrought me,  
From curled silver vapour,  
To list of His mind :—  
Thou couldst not have wrought me !  
So purely, so palely,  
Tinily, surely,  
Mightily, frailly,  
Insculpted and embossed,  
With His Hammer of wind,  
And His Graver of frost.

Here we get the very feeling of the snowflake. D. H. Lawrence reveals in some of his poems the being of a beast or bird or reptile. This is a rare and precious faculty which, so far as I know, the poets of other nations have hardly approached excepting perhaps those of Japan and China.

I should like to linger over the hypersensitive passages in English literature, because no one has collected them ; but I have already said more than I had intended. There is no room even to speak of the beauty of tone that is to be found here and there in English poetry and prose. Blake's lines commencing "Blue, blue . . ." are wonderful.

English prose shows the same personal attitude to life and the cosmos as English poetry. The descriptions in *The Compleat Angler* owe more to the spirit than to the eye. Isaak Walton and his river are inseparable.

Everything is displayed in the round—beauty as well as ugliness. They form an organic whole. Who that has read *Bleak House* can forget its opening? We are given the very genius of the fog! And Thomas Hardy's Egdon Heath is seen as a presence, with a secret life of its own.

This reminds me that almost all great English novelists are regional. They deal with that part of their country which they know best. They love to transfigure a scene, a landscape, or a group of people. There is such a thing as Dickens' London, Hardy's Wessex, Trollope's Barset, and D. H. Lawrence's mining districts. The English novelists lose their sureness of touch when they deal with cosmopolitan themes, or with themes that are unfamiliar to them. But what they have grown up with they make more real than reality.

The same trait is to be observed, in lesser fashion, in the work of the essayists. Lamb can squeeze out in a few words the gaiety and sadness of London life. But I must not talk of Lamb or I would never finish. Leigh Hunt was the most easy nondescript writer of his generation; his grace of movement still pleases. In the hands of Hazlitt and Francis Jeffrey the essay turned into literary criticism of a high order. The personal and confidential note comes in again with Stevenson. The modern essay resembles a lyric in so far as it is moulded by some central mood—whimsical, serious, or satirical. Given the mood, and the essay from the first word to the last, grows around it as the cocoon grows around the silk-worm.

I am inclined to think that the essay is the prose-form that suits the English genius best; for it is the outcome of a nice equipoise. A mild discontent; a wistful longing for that which is not, but which has been or might be; an attempt, brief and fragmentary



but always sincere, to express a problem in terms of one's personality—these are the essentials of the true essay, and the English instinctively follow them. In fact, some of their most striking novels are projections of personal experience—*David Copperfield*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Sons and Lovers*, for example.

But this is not to say that the English are good at writing autobiographies. As a matter of fact, the opposite is the truth. There is in English nothing like the confessions of St. Augustine or Rousseau or Gandhi. George Moore's famous *Conversations in Ebury Street* are, according to A. E., as truthful as an epitaph. The English, the Irish, and the Scotch hate to speak of their private lives ; but they don't mind presenting their personal experiences in a fictitious form.

In fact, digging into the self is abhorrent to the English ; they know that in the backwaters of every consciousness lurk toads. This is what makes even autobiographical English novels so tame in comparison with the French or the Russian.

But the English haven't the slightest objection to putting others under the microscope : in fact they love doing it. Naturally, they write the best biographies in the world. We have only to think of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* and Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria* to realize the truth of this.

The English also excel in the praise of great men or of those whom for one reason or another they admire. I know no elegies in any language so good as *Lycidas*, *Adonais*, *Thyrsis*, or (in parts) *In Memoriam*. But perhaps the English, loving the earth as they do, are particularly moved by death, especially the death of a remarkable man. That seems to them not a catastrophe but a calamity.

To sum up. English literature is mainly a man's literature. It has masculine qualities and masculine

defects. It is rich, exceedingly rich, but untidy. There are no flawless masterpieces in it. The English, trained to be reticent, seem to spill over in print. Their finest poetry is rather loquacious. It has not the verbal and spiritual economy of the Chinese or the Japanese muse. I am glad to see that so fine a critic as Clifford Bax agrees with me in this matter. Read his delightful *Evenings in Albany*. English prose too, is torrential. How much could be cut away with advantage from the novels of Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence ! Even George Moore is too garrulous. Charles Morgan and Somerset Maugham seem to me the most compact of modern English writers. As for the short story, the English possess nothing that can be compared with the best of Turgenev, Chekov, Maupassant, or Tagore.

I am inclined to think that a woman of genius, if she had the courage to be herself, could produce a revolution in English literature. She could tighten it, trim it, fill it with the breath of a new wonder.

However, English literature, such as it is, is one of the marvels of the world. It is individual, poetical, broad as the ocean itself, ever anxious to weave a vision round a chime of words.

It does not tell us what the English are in their daily lives but rather what they would strive to be. The reality of the English spirit is what in these pages we are still groping for. We may yet hope that fresh light will break.

## X

### PHILOSOPHY

PREJUDICES it is said die hard ; but postjudices are, it seems, well-nigh indestructible. Here is a case in point.

Just because the English are (or pride themselves on

being) an eminently practical and commonsensical people, it is believed in many parts of the world, especially in India, that they have achieved nothing wonderful in philosophy. They have no Patanjali or L  o-tze, their critics say ; no Plato or Aristotle ; no one who can be said to play with thought like a magician. Worse still, they have produced not even a Kant or Hegel. What are we to conclude from this ? That, as G. K. Chesterton would say, this world is enough for their wonder and their war. Earth-bound—that is what they are. And so the learned chatter runs.

Now the odd thing is that some distinguished persons, both foreign and indigenous, lend countenance to this view. Shall we hear a few of them ?

“ Thinking is a disease that has not yet spread among the English,” remarked to me years ago Sir Mohammad Iqbal, one of the most daring spirits of modern India. “ The Englishman has no ideas,” writes Dr. Inge, “ and hates an idea when he meets one. The only irreparable mistakes, according to him, are made by consistent thinkers. So he preserves his equilibrium, like a sailor on shore, by rolling heavily from side to side.” T. E. Lawrence informed an oriental inquirer : “ English people don’t write about the verities as a rule, for the good reason that such subjects exceed us and we look foolish in their shadow.”

Is all this true ? I doubt it. The matter is not so simple as it sounds. Generalizations are almost always unreliable, particularly when they apply to an entire people. We must move cautiously, with infinite precautions, if we are to make any progress.

The English are an odd people. They suffer fools easily. Also they love to kid others. And then, if we watch them quietly but carefully, we find that they are both shy and modest. This is not a matter of pose or artifice, but largely a question of temperament

and of perception. Is not modesty itself essentially a product or result of intelligence? Anyway, it is a mistake to evaluate oneself: at best it is a sign of bad manners. However, the English have a holy horror of wearing their hearts on their sleeves for daws to peck at. Even to a life-long friend they will vouchsafe only a few hints about themselves. What they really are, how they actually feel, the way in which they react with the pulse of existence—these things cannot be learned from their books or spoken words. They know how to bury a great deal in silence. In brief, the English guard their inwardness more securely than the Americans appear to guard the secret of the atomic bomb. To judge their being by their expressed views is to make the greatest mistake about them. They seem to board up their susceptibilities so that no one can get his claws hooked in. To know them even a little one must surprise them—that is, see them when they are off their guard and, as it were, in spiritual *déshabille*. There is no other way.

High or low, rich or poor, refined or simple-minded, the English move to the double rhythm of mystery and mystification. It would be interesting to explore this topic, but I have not the space for it here. Sufficient to say that, more than any other people, Eastern or Western, the English appear to delight in the unknown and the unknowable. Though adorers of the actually existent, they feel deep down within themselves, in some dim twilight chamber of their consciousness, that when a truth becomes a fact it loses attraction and value. So they surround themselves with an elaborate symbolism, where the eye, physical and mental, may feed long like a lover's gaze. And they hate to make impertinent assertions about reality. They are never afraid of saying: "I don't know." They believe, like the child, in the charmed power of ignorance which, they hold,

is more far-reaching than knowledge, for it opens out infinite possibilities. They are sure that nothing worth rationalizing can ever be rationalized. They have faith—faith in themselves, in their people, in the destiny of their country, in the rightness of the cosmic scheme.

Wisdom is not a matter of dialectical subtlety. Logic in its argumentative part is ultimately a frivolity. Truth comes suddenly, unexpectedly, in a blinding flash of light. One must be worthy to receive it. Book-learning is a mere vexation of the spirit. The quality of the soul—that is everything. I may be wrong, of course, but I believe that the common man in England has preserved his psyche more or less intact—that is, it is very little overladen with cultural excrescences. He has thus suffered no “Fall”. Paradise has ever been his because he has never lost it. That fate has overtaken the clever ones, those who have gone a-whoring after strange gods.

“The Englishman has no ideas and hates an idea when he meets one.” That is so, but in a deeper sense than Dr. Inge meant. Why should the English, men and women (Dr. Inge gallantly leaves out the fair sex), think about things when they see them in pictures? They leave that exhausting game to those who care for it.

Quite a few do. Let us glance at their efforts.

There are, roughly speaking, two kinds of thinkers, the creative and the constructive. To the first group belong, among others, Kalidasa, Shakespeare, Goethe, Ibsen, and Turgenev; who think through the act of creating. We do not ask these writers for true ideas, but above all for suggestions as to how thought works with various people at various crises. We expect them to make us feel how human beings reason not only when

they are at leisure, but when the vicissitudes of life shake them to their foundations. More than that, we look to these great spirits to unite us to our fellow men in sympathy and a kind of indulgent comprehension. The authors who preach, exhort, or wish to nail us down to narrow conclusions appear less divine than these masters. In a word, creative thinkers are those who do not believe in partial truths, are not dominated by theories, and do not let single, isolated ideas weigh out of proportion to the various strains in their theme. They contemplate life with a Brahma-like omnipresence and geniality.

Constructive thinkers, on the other hand, are mainly occupied with their own speculations and build out of these, with the aid of the cement of logic, rounded systems of thought. Plato, Sankara, Descartes, Hegel, Bergson, Whitehead—to mention but a few names at random—belong to this group. The value of the work of these men depends on the beauty of their intellectual edifices and on the truth and coherence of their respective visions of reality.

The English possess both these types of thinkers. To deal with the latter kind—the professional philosophers—first. Only a few general remarks can be made here.

English philosophy is said to begin with Bacon ; but Bacon, however interesting historically, was not a thinker of the first order. Indeed, he had in many ways a very limited intelligence. He had nothing to say on ultimate problems, and even in science and the study of nature, in which he was thought to excel, he produced nothing of lasting value. He was a mere collector of facts. The imaginative leap, to which we owe so much, was unknown to him. But he had plenty of worldly wisdom and the gift of memorable phrase. Who

can remain indifferent to his flowing and musical sentences. Listen

The truth is, that time seemeth to be of the nature of a river or stream, which carrieth down to us that which is light and blown up, and sinketh and drowndeth that which is weighty and solid.

Again

The fable of scylla is a lively image of the present state of letters, with the countenance and expression of a virgin above, the end in a multitude of barking questions, fruitful of controversy, and barren of effect.

Finally

But as both heaven and earth do conspire and contribute to the use and benefit of man, so the end ought to be for both natural and moral philosophies, to separate and reject vain speculations, and whatever is empty and void, and to preserve and augment whatever is solid and fruitful.

This too is idealism, but idealism on all fours. But Bacon's claim to immortality rests on the fact that he freed philosophy from the incubus of earlier thought—that is, from the barren speculations of ecclesiastics and the schoolmen. He is the father of English empiricism. He is sometimes credited with having written the plays of Shakespeare. This is to confound the leap of a tiger, or the flight of a winged horse, with the gait of an elephant.

I now come to the triad of British philosophers, Locke, Berkeley, Hume—English, Irish, and Scotch respectively. It is difficult to separate their work. They seem to form a trinity. Says Bertrand Russell : “ Man on his own account is not the true subject-matter of philosophy. What concerns philosophy is the universe as a whole ; man demands consideration solely as the instrument by means of which we acquire knowledge of the universe . . . The philosophic spirit demands an

interest in the world for its own sake . . . ” If we accept this then Locke, Berkeley, and Hume are not philosophers in the strict sense of the word ; for they are almost exclusively concerned with man. The universe enters their purview only incidentally. They are primarily psychologists.

But I do not see how there can be a hard and fast division between the study of man and the study of the universe. Russell himself admits : “ But since we apprehend the world through our own senses, and think about it with our own intellect, the picture that we acquire is inevitably coloured by the personal medium through which it comes to us.” If this is so, is it not our most urgent task to examine man, the instrument by which we gain knowledge of the cosmos ?

As a matter of fact the Asiatic quarrel with European philosophy, including the British, is that it has failed to sound the depths of the human spirit. Here I confess I share the view of my race. But let me not anticipate.

Locke is called the high priest of common-sense : his critics say that he is sensible, enlightened, minute, but uninspired and uninspiring. I cannot accept this verdict. To my mind Locke is a very fine thinker : indeed, an intellectual giant : one who carried the empirical method of Bacon to a fine pitch of perfection. And his charm lies in the fact that he was at once modest and bold. In everything he wrote—especially in the famous *Essay on the Human Understanding*—he tried to show the futility of lofty verbiage and bovine acceptance of consecrated opinions, which take the place of free inquiry and individual investigation. Men, he said, must use their own minds, not upon words and their meanings but upon facts, so that they may be freed from the shackles of dogma, and attain to a rationally grounded liberty. And the path by which he sought to accomplish this result was by demolishing the



absurd claims that had been put forth on behalf of the human mind in its isolation from the life, observation, and institutions of the race. Locke undermined rationalism. He thought it absurd to try to understand the universe by sitting in an armchair and brooding about it. That way no results were possible. Experience was the only teacher worth listening to.

With all this the scientist of to-day will agree ; yet there is such a thing as extra-sensuous knowledge. There is a noetic quality about the visions of the saint, the seer, and the mystic. Of this Locke knew little or nothing.

Hume appeals to one's intellect, but not to one's total self. The light he sheds is something akin to darkness. He is extremely brilliant, but without balance and poise. Logical expertise, I think, is his bane. He pushed the principles of Locke to paradoxical conclusions : he denied the existence of the self, questioned the validity of induction, and doubted whether causal laws could be applied to anything except our own mental processes. He was entirely negative. That is not to say that he was always wrong. Far from it. Often he was right. But to be right is not the same thing as to be wise. Hume did not realize that rejection may be acceptance with the sign changed.

With Berkeley we come to a much bigger figure : he was at once philosopher, botanist, mathematician, moralist, evangelist, and a poet. The central purpose of his life was neither the serene examination of concepts nor the dispassionate search for truth. These were secondary considerations with him. This must be noted, or we shall never understand him.

In Berkeley, contrary to most European philosophers, say a Kant or Spinoza, the dialect of dialectics was a part, and not always a dominant part, of a broader spiritual activity. He was priest as well as thinker :

he was a true defender of Christianity, a powerful champion of morality and of the dogmas of his religion. From the *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) to the *Maxims Concerning Patriotism* (1750) he toiled incessantly to establish belief and to increase righteousness in England.

Just because he was so many-sided—not a mere thinking insect—he happened upon one of the greatest philosophic discoveries of the eighteenth century—the definite and definitive reduction of matter to spirit. This great principle is true in itself, and it is so true that it has now been accepted by the better part of the thinking world.

We Indians think it is not enough to *know* a theory. We must live it, feel it, be shaped by it. Berkeley's finding lends itself supremely well to this integral possession of truth. "The whole universe is nothing but *spirit*." These are perhaps paradoxical words, but words that transmute the immense and formidable mass of matter into a moving picture within the mind. The "I" is no longer a drop in the ocean, or a grape in the vat of life, but a wonderful mirror which creates for itself the images that appear in it. One is master of the world; one holds within oneself the whole range of future possibilities. We Indians appreciate this line of thought. It was Krishna who said to Arjuna: "Thou shalt see the universe first in thyself and then in Me."

Subsequent English philosophers are not of the same *envergure* as Berkeley, Locke, or even Hume. I say a word or two about those who interest or impress me in one way or another.

Bradley seems to me the most original of modern English thinkers. *Appearance and Reality* is a great book. Its conclusion, however, could have been expressed in a phrase: "There is only a nominal difference between what *is* and what *appears*."

Bertrand Russell is a puzzling figure. He has a clear head, a sharp eye, and a gift of lucid expression. Whatever he writes is worth meditating on ; yet he is finally disappointing. Something seems to be lacking in him. What can it be ? Russell, it appears, has no soul ; he has merely an over-developed mind. Lacking a still centre he changes his point of view with disconcerting rapidity. I find Whitehead much more stimulating, though I wish he didn't have such a heavy touch ; he makes even simple things sound incredibly difficult. He creates artificial fog and loves to swim in it. Real thought should be expressed with divine simplicity.

G. E. Moore is extraordinarily acute, but he never penetrates to the depths where the real issues lie. He skates skilfully on the surface of reality. He has, it is said, refuted Berkeley. The fact is, he has misunderstood the good bishop. The realists are rather naïve. This may sound impertinent, but what is the good of saying something that one does not believe ?

This is a very selective and very rough outline of English philosophy ; but even if I were to clothe it in flesh, which I have no intention of doing, my general conclusions on the subject in question would remain the same. These I now offer for what they are worth.

British philosophy, like all European philosophy, has never arrived at any clarity, but remains disputable and self-contradictory in almost every direction. That is the first thing that strikes an Asiatic student.

There are various schools of English philosophy—too many in fact. Most of them, however, are based on the leadings or misleadings of some foreigner. I have never been able to understand the respect of the English for Greek and German thought. Plato himself seems to me more valuable as a poet than as a philosopher. As for Aristotle, he was a dry stick burned at both ends. I have read lyrical accounts of *Ethics*. What

does that work contain ? Nothing very wonderful ; it tells us how a Greek gentleman should behave.

The British possess Platonists and Neo-Platonists, Kantians and post-Kantians, and many other philosophical castes and sub-castes but, surprisingly enough, they have no real metaphysicians.

But what do I mean by metaphysics ? Some wit has defined it as " looking for a black cat in a dark room that isn't there ". This raises an easy laugh, but it leads us nowhere. Metaphysics has to do with pure intelligence and the " life divine ". But on this matter let an accepted authority have the last word. René Guénon tells us that " intellectual intuition, by which metaphysical knowledge is to be obtained, has absolutely nothing in common with this other intuition of which certain contemporary philosophers speak : the latter pertains to the sensible realm and in fact is sub-rational, whereas the former, which is pure intelligence is, on the contrary, super-rational. But the moderns, knowing nothing higher than reason in the order of intelligence, do not even conceive of the possibility of intellectual intuition, whereas the doctrines of the ancient world and of the Middle Ages, even when they were no more than philosophical in character, and therefore incapable of effectively calling this intuition into play, nevertheless recognized explicitly its existence and its supremacy over all the other faculties. This is why there was no rationalism before Descartes, for rationalism also is a specifically modern thing, and is moreover closely connected with individualism, as it is nothing else but the negation of any faculty of a supra-individual order. So long as Westerners persist in ignoring or denying intellectual intuition, they can have no tradition in the true sense of the word . . . "

This gives us much food for thought. Where there is no metaphysics there can be no intellectual appre-

hension of reality. English philosophers reason as well as anyone else ; but they do not enter into the heart of the mystery. They offer us a chaos of details and a swarm of theories which destroy one another incessantly.

English philosophers, I have suggested, are particularly interested in Man. George Santayana means the same thing when he writes : " The British and German philosophies belong to an analytic phase of reflection, without spiritual discipline, and their value is merely psychological. Their subject-matter is human knowledge ; and the titles of many of the chief works of this school confess that this is their only theme." We should now expect English philosophers to deepen our knowledge of Man. That they have told us much of value on the subject is perfectly true ; yet they are finally disappointing. The trouble with them is, to use the words of Bergson in another connection, that " they never step beyond the materiality of beings " ; insight into the hearts and minds of others is unknown to them. So they are unable to ascertain the secret thought of Man—including themselves.

To an Asiatic, to a student of Patanjali or of Zen Buddhism, it is clear that English philosophers have not examined Man in all his multiplicity of *esse*. The inner life has scarcely been touched. In fact, Man is a bigger creature than English or European thought has yet realized. He is a unity in a prismatic quaternity. His four states of being are :

The World of Awareness,  
 The World of Dreams,  
 The World of Lethe (Deep Sleep),  
 The World of Nirvana (Ecstasy, or union with the Deity).

The World of Awareness includes Cognition, Feeling, Conation, Intuition. There is no rigid departmental significance about these as psychic states : collectively

they form but a meagre part of the flux of life as it manifests itself in man.

Although various peoples have shown exceptional aptitude in one or another of these directions, it is Europe, especially England, that holds the palm of mastery. This is not surprising, because England, as a whole, is rooted in the conscious life.

With the other states of *being* it has not troubled itself overmuch. This is a matter that we must regret. England, in fact, the whole West, has lived only a microscopic fraction of the life that may be lived. I am afraid the philosophers are chiefly to blame for this.

I suppose it is awareness of this fact that makes the English prefer their artists and men of action to their philosophers. Logic and vision rarely go together.

Take, for instance, Professor Harold Laski and Mr. Churchill. The former is much the more intellectual; yet he is, it will be admitted, not half so sound. Churchill is slow, like most great Englishmen, but he has what matters—weight, depth, breadth.

English philosophers are considered by their countrymen as secondary figures. It is known that they have said less wise things than the creative spirits. Their value, such as it is, lies in sticking to facts and never straying far from them. This the English philosophers always do. They have clipped their wings in order to strengthen their legs. Therein, to my mind, lies their merit. In attempting to create ideal, imaginary universes they are not so good.

However, it is to their artists that the English go for spiritual sustenance. Here we can but follow them.

Shakespeare means more to the English than any other writer. He is their supreme poet and playwright. He is also—I am going to suggest—their greatest creative thinker.

It is easy to cull gems of wisdom from the work of Shakespeare. The meaning of earthly existence—what is it ?

We must endure  
Our going hence, even as our coming hither,  
Ripeness is all.

And our knowledge—what does it amount to ?

Truth may seem, but cannot be ;  
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she ;  
Truth and beauty buried be.

What is Nirvana, of which the Indians speak so much ?

Nothing brings me all things.

Shakespeare puts some of his deepest verities, as Romain Rolland told me, into the mouths of fools, madmen, and the dying. This was a device forced on him by the circumstances of his age. But I do not wish to wrench passages from their context. It is the totality that matters.

Shakespeare created a world of many types, and his philosophy of life embraces them all. So he is, in my opinion, a larger man than any constructive thinker, not excluding even Plato. While the others give us only their own thoughts, Shakespeare gives those of his creations as well.

An interesting point may be noticed here. Balzac, Dostoievsky, and Shaw cannot avoid giving their characters their own genius and fertility in device. Shakespeare avoids this in the main and makes us feel these men's limitations, their narrow ring of thought, while proving the sweep of his own genius.

Shakespeare possesses a strange power, the power of evoking more thought and in more directions than he anywhere elaborates. Even Leonardo and Goethe

cannot properly be compared to him ; even in their art we feel that they are dominated by theories and let particular ideas protrude too much. Shakespeare's thoughts blend with his theme and become a part of the landscape that he is momentarily contemplating.

All the problems of value are old and unsolved. Shakespeare does not treat questions of fact such as science treats, nor of logical deduction such as philosophers treat. He teaches us how to love life in spite of the insoluble problem of evil, and he adds that we can only live well by loving beauty and kindness, in however small parcels we may find them among our fellow men. Art, such as Shakespeare's, is Brahma.

Wordsworth was not a thinker in the strict sense of the word, but he had an emotional apprehension of ideas. I am not going to quote stanzas or lines to prove my point. I will let Keats speak in words which, incidentally, reveals his own mind

Well, I compare human life to a large mansion of many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step into we call the Infant, or Thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain so long as we do not think. We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it, but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us. We no sooner get into the second chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere. We see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight. However, among the effects this breathing is father of, is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of man, of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of misery and heart-break, pain, sickness, and oppression ; whereby this Chamber of Maiden-thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time, on all sides of it, many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages. We see



not the balance of good and evil ; we are in a mist ; we are in that state, we feel the " Burden of the Mystery ". To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive, when he wrote *Tintern Abbey*, and it seems to me that his genius is explorative of those dark passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them. He is a genius, and superior to us, in so far as he can, more than we, make discoveries and shed a light on them.

These words are beyond the ken of English professional philosophers. Had Keats lived he would very probably have explored the deeper states of being of which I have spoken earlier on. However, in his poetry he has given us hints of extra-liminal experience. I wish I had room to disentangle a few of these glints and gleams.

Coleridge's poetry is curiously free from the ache of thought, though we hear in it, when we least expect it, faint murmurs of divine ecstasy—that " singing in the sails " which is not of the breeze. Consider

Beyond the shadow of the ship,  
I watch'd the water-snakes :  
They moved in tracks of shining white,  
And when they rear'd, the elfish light  
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship  
I watch'd their rich attire :  
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,  
They coil'd and swam ; and every track  
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things ! No tongue  
Their beauty might declare :  
A spring of love gush'd from my heart,  
And I bless'd them unaware :  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I bless'd them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray.

Coleridge was enamoured of the Absolute, and in search of it he voyaged strange seas of troubled thought,

until his bark of discovery, tossed to and fro by tempests, remained becalmed, like a painted ship upon a painted ocean. But he brought back, out of his illimitable distress, delicate notations of experience that was at once subjective and objective. Here is an example

In looking at objects of nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon, dim-glimmering through the window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking, a symbolical language for something within me, that already and for ever exists, than observing anything new. Even when the latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling, as if that new phenomenon were the dim awaking of a forgotten or hidden truth of my inner nature. While I was preparing the pen to make this remark, I lost the train of thought which held me to it.

That is real brooding. An apprehension is presented as it came—without refinement, without elaboration, without completion, which futilize the work of most philosophers. But about Coleridge and his “hunger for eternity” I could say a great deal. However, I content myself with remarking that in the seeming waste land of his metaphysics bloom blossoms of almost tropical magnificence.

Shelley, in his *Prometheus Unbound*, touches astonishing depth-levels of thought and feeling ; but in some of his prose pieces he beats the philosophers at their own game. Reflect on this

We do not attend sufficiently to what passes within ourselves. Let us contemplate facts ; let us, in the great study of ourselves, resolutely compel the mind to a rigid consideration of itself. We are not content with conjecture, and inductions, and syllogisms in science regarding external objects. As in these, let us also, in considering the phenomena of the mind, severally collect the facts which cannot be disputed. Metaphysics will thus possess this conspicuous advantage over every other science, that each student by attentively referring to his own mind, may

ascertain the authorities upon which any assertions regarding it are supported. There can thus be no deception, we ourselves being the depositories of the evidence of the subject which we consider.

Kant would have been proud to have written these words. Shelley, however, goes beyond the German thinker and approximates to the findings of Hindu seers. "Being and not-being are identical," said Hegel. A deeper truth is : "Thou shalt see all things first in thyself, and then in Me."

Criticism has shown itself singularly obtuse about Swinburne, who is dismissed as the idle singer of an idle day, which even William Morris was not. The truth is far otherwise. Swinburne was very much more profound than Tennyson or Browning : he was probably the only metaphysical poet of his time and country. But on this subject I have written elsewhere and need not repeat myself. I only call attention to two poems, *Hertha* and *Hymn to Proserpine*. These contain meditations that glow like the throbbing pellets in an exhaust tube.

I approach modern times. Here Sturge Moore, who might be called the poet's poet (which means that the public does not read him at all) is the keenest intelligence that I know. There is more elemental brain work in one of his poems than in many a heavy philosophical tome. Judge for yourself ; I quote from *The Gazelles*

Yet why are they born to roam and die ?  
Can their beauty answer thy query, O soul ?  
Nay, nor that of hopes which were born to fly,  
But whose pinions the common and coarse day stole.

Like that region of grassy hills outspread,  
A realm of our thoughts knows days and nights  
And summers and winters, and has fed  
Ineffectual herds of vanished delights.

A lesser thinker would have given us cheap moralizings. Not so Sturge Moore. He leaves us with an unsatisfied sense of mystery that heightens the interest of the lines. Life, Sturge Moore seems to be saying, is saturated with the inexplicable. Is any doubt possible? To discern the fineness of his mind we need only turn to his notes (see his *Selected Poems*), each one of which is a cameo of crystal thought. One example will suffice

. . . As art only belongs to those who enjoy it, so also in a still higher degree to those whose joy can create with it. For in spiritual things there can be no exclusive ownership.

The entire passage should be pondered by those who attempt to think. It is worthy in itself of a lengthy dissertation. But of course, Sturge Moore is seen at his best in his *Provocations*, which crystallize the mellow wisdom of a lifetime into fiery particles. But the book is still hunting for a publisher.

I could mention other writers as well as several painters, musicians, and men of action who have said subtle and deep things; but I must stop now. I hope I have succeeded in showing that the imaginative spirits of England are more significant than the professed philosophers.

But there is no doubt that the English can think. Indeed, their cardinal fault is that their thought generally stops at the logical or dialectical. They are, like the Greeks whom they love to follow, circumscribed by reason. Natural, simple, chastened, debonair, they are content with the "here and now", and only occasionally catch glimpses of the distant horizon. They do not see things "behind the veil"; they do not penetrate the mystery to the Eternal Ethos.

This is simply to say that they have no seers—no one who looks at mortal things with the eyes of an immortal.

But what is the philosophy of the English? They say

that we orientals decide many things which remain open and cannot be decided. The situation of a man's mind imposes, in their view, a less distinct horizon. After the "things are not what they seem" comes the "I too but seem". Appearances are essentially variable and untrustworthy. Faith in value, which is inherently essential, cannot be expressed since all appearances are liable to deceive compared with this which cannot sufficiently be distinguished from appearances. The moment's content of consciousness is all that is in a reliable focus and in a minute it becomes a memory liable to misinterpretation, inviting self-deception! The unknown and unknowable till now, or so far, are instantly present. Our instinctive meaning may very well be more important than our reasoned meaning

Alas, too soon all  
Man's grave reasons disappear ;  
Yet I think at God's tribunal  
Some large answer you shall hear.

The argument from authority is ineffective because we are the final authority, known to ourselves. That this position is more suitably expressed in poetry, paradox, and self-contradiction than in deeds or arguments is obvious. However inadequate what this or that prophet or seer knew and meant, it may be that what we believe he would have been right to mean approaches explicitness.

Such is the quintessential thought of the English. They have no fixed philosophy. They state a problem, recognizing that it exists and acknowledging also that they have not found a solution for it. That, from the level of the earth is, I think, a sign of exceptional maturity.

But the English love to complicate matters. Edward Garnett called them "problem-makers par excellence".

Well, the English ask : “ Is a man what he says or what he does when he is surprised ? ” This last, reply the English, explains if not his philosophy, for he may have none, his ultimate character or being.

I don't know. I can think of no one, living or dead, whose actions may be said to be the full expression of his soul. Our doings are only a part of our isness. I am convinced that Jesus died with half the music in him.

## XI

### RELIGION

SOME seven or eight years ago I received for review Mr. Leslie Belton's *Creeeds in Conflict*. This book was a revelation : it showed that all major faiths and many minor ones flourished unmolested in England. And I myself have had the pleasure and privilege of encountering English Vedantists and English Buddhists, English Muslims and English theosophists and, of course, more sects and sub-sects of Christianity than I can remember. The other day I was invited to join the Planetarians (whatever they are).

It is unquestionable that in the matter of religions the English have outshone all Western nations with the possible exception of America where, I understand, everything believable and unbelievable is firmly believed and where an alliance has been forged between the dollar and the Almighty. We Orientals have not gone so far. We are, as we are beginning to find out, unpractical : we invent faiths and leave it to others to exploit them !

However, let us not confound quantity with quality. Are the English religious ?

It is impossible to answer this question without first

defining religion which, like love and democracy, is a portmanteau-word into which anything can be packed.

If by religion we mean the relationship of the individual to the deity, then the English are clearly not religious, for the simple reason that as a people they are not interested in the matter.

This is not to say that they do not believe in God. Of course they do. But it is a vague belief, a part so to speak, of the social thought.

Exceptions must always be admitted. There are, and have always been, men and women who have tried to establish a personal link between themselves and the Creator. Recently an English artist, a well-known portrait painter, wrote to me : " Professional goodness has never attracted me and forms and ceremonies or even creeds seem to me things apart from real religion. At heart they are all the same, and I want Younghusband's ' World Congress of Faiths ' to publish a short anthology from the Bibles of all religions to show how much this is so. I consider myself a religious man, although I cannot swallow any of the creeds whole. My trouble is not that I don't believe in God, but that I don't believe in anything else. God and reality are to me synonymous. The face of which reality I find shining through nature as beauty . . . " Others, I know, hold similar and even deeper views ; but I am talking of men in the mass and these, I am obliged to say, do not think of God as a reality that can be experienced. Their attitude is peculiar. It is worth lingering on it a little.

The ordinary people in England imagine God to be a person who is directly interested in their doings. If they are wicked, He punishes them ; if they are virtuous, He rewards them. To these men and women God is a kind of magistrate who metes out justice with robot precision.

I should say that in the mind of even educated English, God is an individual who sits on a throne in some mansion in the upper regions. So at least Christian theology teaches. To me, I confess, this seems a form of idolatry. I cannot see the difference between an English bishop praying to someone whom he calls "our Father" and an Indian beggar-woman prostrating herself before a stone image of Siva or Kali. In both cases we have anthropomorphism.

Anyway, I cannot understand the English idea of God, who is said to be a personal sovereign, just and merciful, it is true, but entirely distinct from His creatures. This reduced Him, I think, to the dimensions of a Pasha. "In respect of its doctrine of God," says Whitehead, "the Church gradually returned to the Semitic concept, which is clear, terrifying, and improbable." I agree.

But what is the religion of the average individual in England? The following verses, Dr. Inge tells us, express it "well enough"

Give me a good digestion, Lord,  
And also something to digest ;  
Give me a healthy body, Lord,  
With sense to keep it at its best.

Give me a healthy mind, O Lord,  
To keep the good and pure in sight,  
Which seeing sin is not oppressed,  
And finds a way to set it right.

Give me a mind that is not bored,  
That does not whimper, whine, or sigh ;  
Don't let me worry overmuch  
About the fussy thing called I.

Give me a sense of humour, Lord,  
Give me the grace to see a joke,  
To get some happiness from life  
And pass it on to other folk.



Dr. Inge adds : " This pleasant creed falls short of human needs at their best." That is a very mild way of putting it. It is no creed at all ; it is a prayer for greater muscularism. Oriental worldlings have done slightly better. Here is what Azizuddin, the Foreign Minister of Ranjit Singh, wrote while getting the better of so accomplished a diplomat as Malcolm

If you attentively regard the world  
 You will find it fugitive as a shadow :  
 Why should you vex yourself with vain desires  
 When you have no power to perform ?  
 Forget yourself, and leave your work with God ;  
 Trust yourself with all confidence to Him.  
 Wait with patience until He shall bless you,  
 And thank Him for what he has already given.  
 Stop your ears from the sound of earthly care ;  
 Rejoice in God and be hopeful of His mercy.  
 The wise would consider me as an idolater  
 Should I thoughtlessly speak of myself as " I " ;  
 To the wise and to those who most nearly know,  
 It is folly for any mortal to assert " I am " ;  
 Although able to vanquish Sahrab, Zal, and Rustam,  
 Yet at the last your stability is but as water.  
 It is a vain thought that your reason may spin  
 His imaginings, as a spider spins her web.  
 It is well that I should breathe the air of freedom,  
 For I know that everything is dependent on God.

This reminds us of the Greek saying : " Only one Being exists always and fills eternity—that is God, who gives life to all things and who dwells within man. This is why Apollo says to his worshipper ' Know thyself '."

Religion must take all reality for its province, but being essentially concerned with deeper values, it arranges experience hierarchically, assigning a higher degree both of value and of truth to those aspects of our awareness in which the spirit " bears witness to our spirit ". The common man in England does not even

suspect that we are in touch with a sphere above that in which we usually live.

The English it is said are mainly concerned with this world ; things unseen mean little to them. If this is so, the results of the attitude are plain. The English have produced no world teachers like the Buddha, Jesus, Zoroaster, and Mohammad. They have also nothing that distantly approaches the *Upanishads* or the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Their religious leaders are curiously small men. Why, they have no book that can compare with the *Pensées* of Pascal. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which is lauded so much, is mere fustian and common-sense. English religious poetry, from Anglo-Saxon times to the present day, has not the divine theoria of Asiatic bards. It even lacks the note of profundity that one hears at times in Dante.

This may seem impertinent, but it is considered and it is not said without respect.

I am inclined to think that few English have understood the sterner side of the Christian creed. The teachings of Jesus have been watered down to suit the temperament of the people. For me, for example, the Prophet of Nazareth's two deepest sayings are : " He that saveth his self shall lose it " ; and " If the light that is in you be darkness how great is that darkness . . . ". How deep the first saying goes ! Its meaning : that these fast-fleeting earth-days are our chance to get rid of our very self, of our once-valued personality, and to become something quite different . . . Almost the most moving incident in Jesus' life I find to be that awe-inspiring vignette at dusk, when he " set his face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem ", when he rode ahead as though " fey " (as indeed he was) and his disciples were nearly terrified.

All this makes little appeal to the English. Their Christianity, whatever else it may be, is not Christism—

the path of Jesus. Extremely few do what he did. For the majority their faith is a matter of tradition and personal predilection. Even such a minor matter as musical appreciation may detach a person from Protestantism in favour of Catholicism. It is, in fact, a question of taste, and every member of a family might belong to a different religious persuasion without the oddity attracting any general comment. The cultured classes may accept their creed in all sincerity, but it is not the mainspring of their lives. It is mere literature.

But what is the good of Christ unless each one says to himself *how is it with thee?*, unless each one becomes what Christ was. *That* is Christianity, and it would be utterly inaccurate to say that the English nation, or any part of it, is Christian in that sense. Its educated classes harbour many and conflicting ideals. They are in a state of painful uncertainty, each with a different aim and shaping himself according to a different type; while the masses, as I have remarked before, are almost entirely given over to the "natural man". There is no controlling influence to bind together the scattered energies. People know not what they want nor the way to get it. They read this or that book, and wander spiritually: they do not advance on a straight and clear road. The truth is that there is no irreversible standard by which everything can be judged. Yet, to be a Christian, not in name but in fact, is to have a steady and continuous vision: it is to follow, like a soldier, the way of Christ, to be always asking oneself, *how would Christ have it?*

I don't suppose many English ask themselves this question. Why not? Because it does not even occur to them. Here the fault clearly lies with their clergy. Organized religion, Dr. Inge has said with his customary frankness, is the influencing of the half-converted

by the half-educated. Dr. W. R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, tells me that this is perfectly true. Further comment is unnecessary.

The English, I have said, pay little attention to Christism, and it is greatly to be doubted whether most of them know what early Christianity stood for. As the subject is important, a little might be said about it. But let someone speak who is more competent than I.

"The most primitive Christian faith," says Santayana, "consisted in a conversion of the whole man—intellect, habits, and affections—from the life of the world to a new mystical life, in answer to a moral summons and a prophecy about destiny. The moral summons was to renounce home, kindred, possessions, the respect of men, the hypocrites of the synagogue, and to devote oneself to a wandering and begging life, healing, praying, and preaching. And preaching what? Preaching the prophecy about destiny which justified the conversion and renunciation; preaching that the world, in its present constitution, was about to be destroyed on account of its wickedness, and that the ignorant, the poor, and the downtrodden, if they trusted this prophecy, and turned their backs at once on all the world pursued, would be saved in the new deluge, and would form a new society of a more or less supernatural kind, to be raised on the ruins of all present institutions . . . The primitive Christian was filled with the sense of a special election and responsibility, and of a special hope. He was serene, abstracted, incorruptible. He was as incapable of attacking as of serving the state; he despised or ignored everything for which the state exists, labour, wealth, power, felicity, splendour, and learning. With Christ, the natural man in him had been crucified, and in Christ he had risen again a spiritual man to walk the earth as a messenger from heaven for a few more years. His

sole life was an experience of perpetual graces and racles."

I have had the honour of meeting some great and good English, but not one of them, I am sorry to say, view Christianity in the above light. Most of them were satisfied with the world of facts and valuations in which is our lot to be cast. One or two of them had glimpses of higher truths, but they did not know how to connect these with the earth of eye and touch, where claims and counter-claims make up the pattern of days.

Now, as every inquirer is aware, Christianity is a eclectic religion, a fusion of three lines of thought, which spring from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Greek speculation. It seems to me that the English have been more deeply affected by the first and last influences than by the second.

The Jew of old, as his sacred writings prove, clung to earthly existence because he believed in its reality. Indeed, he often spoke as though after death there was nothing. Most English appear to share this view. "Our little life is rounded with a sleep." And from the Greeks the English have learned, what is in harmony with their deepest instinct, that existence on this passionate planet is something to rejoice in for its own sake. *Mens sana in corpore sano*—why, this is grand. Christianity, with its larger enthusiasms and disquieting dreams, is there, but it is like a glimmering star which can be admired but which cannot be picked and worn in one's buttonhole as a flower.

The Chinese are frankly and unashamedly earthlings. Spiritual hankerings don't trouble them. The English are not like that. They are interested in the Near and the Far, and want to make the best of both worlds. Their dilemma is terrible: they can neither accept Christianity nor reject it. This is the root-cause of their melancholy. This earth-life, the English know, is good

and glorious ; and yet—who can tell ? Perhaps, after all, there is a beyond ! “ O God ! I could be bound in a nutshell,” says Hamlet, “ and count myself king of infinite space ”—and adds significantly, “ were it not that I have bad dreams.” The English, like the Prince of Denmark, cannot get rid of bad dreams, which come to them in the midst of their greatest satisfactions and triumphs and spoil everything. And some of them cry out or rather echo the words

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world.

Such being their spiritual state, the English try to compromise between earth and heaven. That is to say, they are neither this-worldly nor other-worldly : they are betwixt and between, and remind us forcibly of Mohammad's coffin.

“ Compromise,” says Santayana, “ is odious to passionate natures because it seems a surrender, and to intellectual natures because it seems a confusion ; but to the inner man, to the profound psyche within us, whose life is warm, nebulous, and plastic, compromise seems the path of profit and justice. Health has many conditions ; life is a resultant of many forces. Are there not several impulses in us at every moment ? Are there not several sides to every question ? Has not every party caught sight of something veritably right and good ? Is not the greatest practicable harmony, or the least dissension, the highest good ? . . . ”

Keyserling contradicts this flatly. “ Spiritual power and earthly power,” he writes, “ are of two entirely different dimensions, on two different levels. The spirit cannot act on a level that is first and foremost a level of the earth ; it is a force in itself, unconnected with the earth or with any of its expressions. It acts even outside the intellect. That is why it can appeal only to a few

people, to those who are capable of producing spiritual reactions within themselves. A nation as a whole cannot possibly follow such an appeal ; but it can follow the magnetic power which is contained in the idea of earth and blood . . . You must not try to mix up spirit and blood. They are of different dimensions. No epoch understood that contrast better than the Middle Ages. Spirit was embodied in them in the personality of the Pope, and flesh in that of the Emperor."

Who is right—the Baltic German or the Spanish American ? Compromise does seem the path of profit and justice in most matters, but not in all. The English, for instance, have tried to mix up spirit and blood in their religion, and what is the result ?

The English Church has become a business organization. It is more insulting for a bishop or archbishop to be called ungentlemanlike than un-Christian. He is first and foremost a man of the world.

In fact Christianity is in such a bad plight to-day in England because there are no great religious teachers. There are both scholars and saints, but there are extremely few men who put their convictions above everything else. Most clergymen are always compromising truth by yielding to mundane considerations. And, what is far worse, they are divided souls.

Take for instance Dr. Inge. He has never made up his mind whether he is on the side of Plato or of Jesus, though it looks fairly clear that he is more of a Platonist than a Christian. But, if so, he dare not admit his real attitude openly. Why not ? Simply because he is afraid of harming Christianity. The same charge applies to many other distinguished Church dignitaries. Their intellect does not harmonize with their profession. Yet, curiously enough, they cling to their posts.

The younger generation in England, which does not consist of fools, sees through this masquerade.

The truth is that religion in England has been too much influenced by politics. It began from the days of Queen Elizabeth : she accepted the thirty-nine articles not because she believed in them, but because she found them politically advantageous : they would, she thought, keep Protestants and Catholics less divided. And to-day religion and politics are inextricably mingled together, so much so that the Archbishop of Canterbury is expected to be more of a statesman than a saint or seer. And naturally this standard is accepted by the rank and file in the church. Most of them, owing to the pressure of circumstances, render unto Cæsar not only the things that are Cæsar's but also those that belong to God.

Exceptions apart, the village priest is the finest servant of Christ in England. He keeps the light of his faith burning.

The Church dignitary is necessarily a politician. And he has done not a little to bring Christianity into disrepute.

There is no doubt that it is impossible to compromise in spiritual matters. Uncertainty of belief and preoccupation with worldly affairs, however cleverly hidden, do somehow leak out and vitiate the very air we breathe. It is like putting away a corpse in an alabaster coffin.

English Christianity is then *sui generis*. It is not what Jesus taught, and it is not what many of us understand by Christianity. It is an odd mixture of Hebraism, Hellenism, Paulinism, and sturdy English common-sense.

But if the English are not Christians in the full or even deeper sense of the word, that does not mean that they are not religious. They are. I hasten to explain.

The English have been brought up on the Bible



which is, so to say, their daily food. Thus many of the teachings of Jesus influence their conduct unconsciously.

But being primarily interested in this world, and especially in making life tolerable here, they have appropriated the Christian ethic—at least in part, that part which meets with their needs and which experience has taught them to be useful. Indeed, had Christianity not come to England, the English would, to my mind, have evolved a similar ethic by themselves.

“Live and let live”—that is the instinctive creed of the English. Perhaps it is in part the effect of their gracious climate and their sea-girt isle. But however it came into being, it is there ; and it is finer than many a lofty doctrine I know.

“Cruelty,” said Dr. W. R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul’s, to me, “is unfortunately not one of the seven deadly sins in Christianity. Hence we Westerners remain brutes at heart.” This may be so : horrible things have happened between the two wars. Yet I am bound to say that most English loathe cruelty. They believe in justice. Suffering, even when deserved, makes them wince. Personally, I admire this trait.

The English love animals, whom they do not call “lower creatures” but “our dumb friends”. This habit must have been self-developed, for there is not a word in the Christian Gospels enjoining a kindly treatment of animals. Jesus himself, as we know, had no mercy on pigs.

The English do not evade reality, but face it in a positive way. I think this is a form of meditation. To learn through direct experience, through pain and suffering, what one’s inmost attitude is when facing life and the cosmos, this is, I believe, the finest kind of spiritual exercise. The English ever practise it. Think of Charles Lamb.

The doctrine of Maya—that the world is a shadow-show—seems to the English purely speculative and very presumptuous as a solution of the problem of Evil. They prefer an unknown to such a guess. Shakespeare has, for instance, Montaigne's respect for ignorance and will not forestall what it hides by impertinent assertions. He, seeing "sermons in stones and good in everything", does not need to destroy the world but believes it will be transformed, for he has seen it transformed. And if he ever thought that "not a wrack would remain", he was comparing it to a dream which gives place to the real world. So the real world would, in time, yield to a more real world.

Why is this world made? If it is not to be made better and to make us better. To suppose it made in vain only to be escaped from seems terribly impious. We know not why it was made, but at least, if we conjecture, let us conjecture nobly. To fancy that *the absence of the visible scheme* is better than it is is absurd; we can only think of that absence by means of thoughts that are symbols of what we find in its presence.

Such is the quintessential attitude of the English. They hold that life is nearer to God than thought can ever be, that grace of being in action is the divinest thing to be found on earth, and next grace of speech. There is perhaps another way of achieving union with the Deity: this consists in not judging, not concluding, maintaining the learner's readiness to see good in spite of the most incomprehensible tragedies, in never giving way to the delusion, or, rather, insane presumption, of deciding that all creation is a myth or a dream.

I pause. I seem to be getting beyond my depth. The real result of probing into the religion of the English cannot be analysed or split up under headings. It is a spirit which evokes our spirit and combines with

it. The Virgin-Rose of Dante, which some contemplate, has been transformed by the English into the Rose of England.

## XII

## POLITICS

CERTAIN stars, invisible to the naked eye, are best perceived by an oblique gaze. This is a method well known to astronomers. I shall make use of it here.

Like other inquirers, I have read a number of books on English politics, and though I have derived some benefit from them, on the whole I have been obliged to echo old Omar's words : " I came out . . . wherein I went."

It is after some study of life and literature that one realizes that speech is given to man to conceal his thoughts. The English understate ; the French exaggerate. What is the difference ? In neither case do we get the exact truth.

Anyhow, the English never explain what needs explaining. They prefer large outlines that resemble Brocken images. Indeed, they feel that what is obvious can't possibly be true. Hence their distrust of theories, systems, plans. The more clear-cut and coherent these are, the more, it seems, they are to be avoided. Whatever the philosophers may say, the English are fully persuaded that life will not fit any intellectual mould ; only experience, with its triumphs and failures, can suggest its possibilities.

Naturally the English, barring the brittle intellectuals and the too clever by half, do not bow down before Reason, which they would rank with Kali, the Indian goddess of destruction, if they knew about her. They are largely guided by instinct.

In this they resemble woman ; yet they are a very masculine people. We might meditate on this paradox in passing.

Now, let us consider the supreme achievement of the English spirit—at least in literature. I am referring to the plays of Shakespeare. They do not remind us, as those of Racine do, of a Greek column bathed in sunshine. They are, like London or the British Empire, a mysterious forest which has to be explored bit by bit. Then what surprises !

English politics are a much more obscure matter. In one respect they may be compared to an iceberg. The glittering part is visible to anyone who has eyes to see ; but what of the hidden depths and—how shall I put it?—of the currents and cross-currents that move the entire mass ?

A stranger would be a bold bumpkin if he pretended to answer these questions with thimble-rig assurance. Personally, I can only say what I have managed to pick up on the subject.

The first thing to notice about English politics is that they are not a logical construction, but a natural growth. They have sprung up as naturally as a tree or a blossom ; and their roots lie deep down in the English character.

From fairly early times the English have shown a predilection for debate and discussion. They feel cheated if at any time—not excluding even a grim war period—anything is done without a spate of words. No wonder their parliament is known as “ the talking-shop ”.

And how the English adore Commissions ! Is there some trouble in Mesopotamia ? Well, send a Commission. Is there any bother in Egypt ? Well, send a Commission. Is there unrest in Timbuctoo ? Well, send a Commission. As for India, it has known the

tender attentions of more Commissions than any other part of the Commonwealth. Here my country clearly holds the record. Something to be proud of.

There is no doubt that the English are very Commission- and Committee-minded. This national habit ("In the beginning was the word") exasperated Colonel Lawrence, who has said many sarcastic things about it.

Yet, to my mind, it is the most civilized way of doing things. What is hateful is ukases.

The object of Commissions and kindred bodies is to sift facts and to recommend a course of action. If they achieve that, they are to be welcomed ; if they are a cloak for postponing things indefinitely, they are to be deplored. Unfortunately the English sometimes use Commissions for the latter purpose. But here, too, they are not without wisdom. The Governor of an Indian province once told me that soon after he took office he had to face a tricky situation : he was asked to adjudicate between two contending parties. Whatever he did, he knew, he was bound to be unpopular. So, being a true Englishman, he appointed a Commission, and went to sleep. By the time the report appeared—"after a sufficient little while, and couched in the best Whitehallese, which puzzled even crusty old lawyers"—the rumpus was a thing of the past.

There are times when it is best to do nothing. The English understand that supremely well.

It is well at this point to pause and ask what politics are. They are, I think, the mechanism by which the life of a community as a community is determined or regulated. Now this is a complex business. To begin with, whatever science exists in a country is naturally applied to the methods of government. But English politics are a science in a slightly different way. By this I mean that the collective will is wisely directed

into certain channels. Here the English rulers have worked miracles : they have so moulded the people—high and low—that, in a crisis, they act as one man. This achievement finds no parallel elsewhere : it is unique. There is not much difference in England between a rabid Conservative and a rabid Labour man. Divergence is to be found only in tempo and methods. But the gulf is not so great as it appears. What, after all, is the difference between Mr. Eden and Mr. Bevin ?

The fact is, enlightened Conservatism is the most characteristic feature of all parties in English politics. Brougham was not indulging in a mere witticism when he said : “ What is valuable is not new, and what is new is not valuable.” That is how most English feel. Even Americans, seemingly so restless, have come to accept this point of view. I believe it was Emerson who remarked that when a new book appeared he read an old one.

But I was talking of English politics as a science. Here it corresponds to the game of cricket. Now this team bats, now that ; but the rules—including decency, fair play, and obedience to the verdicts of the umpire—are the same for both. And each team is judged by its performance—that is, by the impression it creates in the world and by the benefits it piles up for England.

Now, a cricket match can be played by only two elevens, not by three or four at the same time. So a third or fourth party is superfluous in England. It is hardly surprising that the Liberals, though their influence is great, are nowhere in the elections. There is, it seems, no future for them until they succeed in squeezing out the Conservatives. Which, to say the least, is unlikely. The English like balance above all things.

On the Continent and elsewhere they don't understand this cricket-view of politics. There, so far as my

knowledge goes, Democracy resembles a threesome at golf, or an odd number of cardplayers each thinking of his own hand. In Russia they prefer batting to bowling. Whatever these forms of government may be, they are, in the English opinion, not cricket.

But I have merely touched the fringes of my subject. To come to the heart of it. Here English politics are an art which has been brought to a fine pitch of perfection. Let me go a little more deeply into this.

A lot of nonsense is talked about Freedom and Democracy. Often these two words are taken to be synonymous. This is sheer muddle-headedness. Perfect freedom is possible nowhere except on a desert island. The first and foremost task of a government, of any government worth the name, is the preservation of law and order, and that inevitably means the limitation of freedom.

In a recent broadcast Mr. E. M. Forster said that a government might do what it liked with our bodies, but that—here there was almost a prayer in his voice—it must not tamper with our minds. Fine ; but what does it exactly mean ? Mr. Forster calls himself a Liberal. Why ? Because such is the tradition of his family. So his mind was not left free ! If he had been born in a Conservative household, he would have preached Conservatism. A free man belongs to no political party ; he is without any labels.

The English don't like irritating restrictions. True ; but who does ?

All peoples, Eastern or Western, have experienced tyranny at one time or another. The English are no exception. Dictatorship, of a particularly galling kind, was clamped down upon them at the Norman Conquest ; but—and this is the point—they were not overwhelmed by it. They loathed it and continued to

struggle against it until they were able to curb it. There was no careful planning about this ; it was a spontaneous movement of revolt that manifested itself in cottage and palace alike.

In truth, irrational is the word that comes to mind when one thinks of English development. Logic and reason seem to have had very little to do with it.

The English are in many ways more republican than the French or the Americans ; yet they have a Sovereign whom they reverence ! Odd, say foreigners. Perhaps ; but it works. Only their groping methods could have taught the English the fitness of so paradoxical a creation as a monarchical Republic or a republican Monarchy. Intellectually, the very idea is absurd : it confounds reason : but there is no doubt that it is a new and rich discovery in the art of government.

Robbed of all political power, Royalty has not lost any prestige in England. On the contrary, it is more popular than ever. How are we to account for this ? It is, I suppose, a case of Yaweh becoming " our Father ". The English Sovereign is truly the head of a family—the British Commonwealth of Nations. Here perhaps the symbol is more important than the reality, for it can be filled with any meaning. No well-thought-out scheme could have produced anything so seemingly singular ; only the " muddling through " technique of the artist, who gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name, could have stumbled upon a crazy arrangement that functions so well.

Of all men the political theorist is the one most to be dreaded : he looks at the earthy scene through a mist of his own making, finds it chaotic, wishes to break it down and build it nearer to his heart's desire. He doesn't bother about living and suffering mortals. No, he treats them as clay figures that can be



refashioned. So he presses them into the mould of some imagined perfection. By the time he has finished all that we get is a race of robots. Our enthusiast forgets that all value attaches to individuality—even to the point of eccentricity.

The political artist, on the other hand, takes humanity as it is. He does not wish to alter it to fit some impeccable plan. He accepts its bewildering variety, its different gifts, its manifold defects. He wants each individual to develop according to the laws of its being. He thinks that government is made for the convenience of the people, not the people for the convenience of government. In a word, blood and bones are far more precious to him than the most attractive Ism.

Idealism ! The very worst sins have been committed in its name. The artist knows this but too well ; and he also knows, what the brave theorist ever forgets, that at our best and highest we are but specks of dust in infinity, at the mercy of every varying wind. But here on earth, though nothing abides, all is not vanity. A few things do matter. What are these ? Freedom to live, freedom to love, freedom to create, freedom to worship. Perhaps these are the only realities. All else is not silence, but sound and fury signifying nothing.

So the English believe. It is not a matter of thought, but of feeling. However, in their haphazard, instinctive way these people have happened upon something that is of value to the whole world. It is a thousand pities that there are still those who speak of the Empire as "our Empire". This is short-sighted. The Empire is the private property of no one ; it is a collective enterprise in which many, including us Indians, have played their part. In any case, imperialism in the old sense is dead : the Statute of Westminster gave it the finishing stroke. But few regret its passing ; it was an

unwholesome influence in the world. The best English thought understood, even before the terror of Hitlerism, that power corrupts and fear degrades. Hence the uprise of the Commonwealth, which is a nobler conception, tenuous as a moonbeam yet strong as steel.

The English intuitive method of government is like painting a picture or composing a symphony or creating an epic. Vision—seeing a new relationship—that is the primary thing; then the incarnating of this vision into the chosen medium. Often fine frenzy achieves what conscious effort is powerless to do. The British Commonwealth of Nations is, I think, a greater achievement than *Paradise Lost* or *Paradise Regained*. Why? Because it enriches life in larger measure.

People who argue about everything and find fault with whatever they see—there are some such in every country—thought that the free Colonies would drift apart from England at the first sign of danger. Two ghastly wars have proved this fear to be more or less groundless. The silken ties of affection and self-interest are stronger than the iron chains of treaties and pacts and alliances. I am convinced that an independent India, provided that she is handled with tact, will be nearer to England and the Commonwealth than she is to-day. Trust begets trust. If the Orientals never forgive an insult they also never forget a kindness. Psychology, especially racial psychology, I emphasize, is more important than our statesmen seem to think. It is the heart and soul of politics.

The idea of nations forming a family is something revolutionary in international affairs; yet it is the easiest way of avoiding decadence and death. "Each for all, and all for each." That is wisdom. The unity that we find in the Commonwealth is that of a masterpiece, in which all the parts are neither equal nor of equal value, but each contributes its particular effect

to the beauty and grandeur of the whole. Australia alone is a small nation ; Canada alone is a small nation ; even England alone is not as formidable as she used to be ; but together, as members of the Commonwealth, they are a mighty Power, second to none.

I cannot help thinking that here the English have learned from the despised Hindu joint-family system.

The English seldom act "according to plan" ; generally they trust to the inspiration of the moment. The right action, with the right strength, at the right time—such is their method. Take, for instance, their foreign policy. It is not easy to say what they will or will not do on a given occasion. They merely throw out vague hints which can be interpreted in various ways. Knowing this, foreigners get angry and call the English treacherous, hypocritical, and what not. All of us have heard of "Perfide Albion !" But this is ridiculous. Cecil Rhodes was more qualified to speak on the matter. He said : "The English are a conservative race, and like to move slowly and, as it were, experimentally."

That is the truth. The English, like any artist, are intent on the vision : they never lose sight of it ; but they do not know how or when they are going to realize it. They keep on experimenting with themselves and with others. How then can they tell others—both their friends and foes—where they stand ? The only thing we can be sure of is that they are ever on the march.

Against whom ? No one in particular. Anyone who stands between them and their goal.

A character in one of Ibsen's plays says : "I know what you are saying, but I do not know what you are thinking." This is particularly true of the English. They have mastered the art of verbal camouflage. Often they themselves do not know what they mean

by a certain statement. They make it all the same. Why? Because it leaves people guessing. The French do not see through this game; nor, for that matter, do we Indians. We are the slaves of words. The English treat them as the counters of wise men and the money of fools. I think Humpty Dumpty put the matter even better. He told Alice, à propos of his use of words: "I pay them extra and make them mean what I like." Only the English can fully appreciate that. No wonder they admire Bernard Shaw so much. Spiritually, he is one of them: he doesn't mean a thing he says and says it charmingly.

We must understand that the English often speak with their tongue in their cheek.

From this we must not deduce that they are frivolous. Indeed, no. They are made of very tough fibre. They do not let events mould them; they mould events to their ends. And their tenacity is astonishing. Rhodes, for example, toiled for thirteen years with the single-minded zeal of a saint to bring the diamond industry of South Africa under the control of De Beers Consolidated Mines, Limited. This is remarkable in a man naturally of an impatient and petulant disposition. Yet it is this singular fixity of purpose that has created the Empire. The French, after a failure or two, get discouraged. The English do not give in easily. They carry on in spite of all difficulties. Indeed, they are at their best when they are at bay.

They do not set limits to their ambition. They believe that things will be what they wish them to be. A little before his death Sturge Moore wrote to me: "I am a flaw in the glass through which the future shows itself in rosy tints." This is how most English feel.

The world is topsy-turvy, say the pessimists. The English smile. They know that mankind follows a line

of progress in civilization even when it seems to retrogress. The Spirit is always working beneath the surface of human life and only awaits the right moment to manifest itself in its plenitude. If winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

But the English go beyond that. They are sure that God needs their collaboration. Perhaps He does. Who can tell? Was it not Pirandello who said?—"Right you are if you think you are."

Are the English interested in goodness for the sake of goodness? Let a great industrialist, whom I had better not name, speak: "Altruism is all right; but we English think that altruism plus ten per cent is better."

This reminds me that the English honour a man if he is successful; they disown him if he is a failure. Take, for instance, the Jameson Raid. Had it come off, the principal actors in it would have had the thanks of Parliament and maybe peerages! But as it turned out to be a fiasco, it was frowned upon. Jameson was not only a criminal, but, what was much worse, a bungler!

However, the English never do anything crudely. They know how to treat those who have let them down: they ask them to disappear in the House of Lords. "Kicked up" is a delightful English phrase. Sir Francis Younghusband explained its beauties to me with a wry smile. He said that when he had done something which he thought right, but which the authorities did not approve of, he was recalled and knighted! Can disgrace be more decorous?

The English do not think that independence is the birthright of anyone. It is something to be fought for, gained, and preserved with great care. And they hold that

. . . who would be free, themselves must strike the blow.

Their political philosophy boils down to this : " The world is mine oyster which I shall open with my sword." They are strong, very strong, but they like to give the impression that they are weak and vacillating. This is a pose which deceived even Napoleon. When the latter was contemplating his attack on England he assured the head of his Navy that it would be easy, by creating disturbance in other parts, to lull England into a false security, for " there is nothing ", he said, " so short-sighted as the English Government. It is a Government absorbed in party politics (*chicanes intérieures*), which turns its attention to wherever there is a noise." This was an error not confined to Napoleon, or his age ; in our time Hitler and Mussolini have fallen victims to it ; and to-day there are others who are making the same mistake, forgetting that the English, being an island race, have acquired the power of basing their decisions on carefully sifted facts, and of acting when the necessity arises. Canning hit the nail on the head when he likened England, tranquil but resolute, to a battleship in repose. Often England is, like the battleship, slumbering on her shadow in perfect stillness. Seemingly passive and motionless, she is quietly concentrating the power to be put forth on an adequate occasion, though what the occasion might be she scarcely knows in advance. Then, when the right time comes, England collects her scattered elements of power, and awakens her dormant thunder.

We must never underestimate the strength of England. We shall do so at our peril.

But the English never rattle their sword. They leave that to upstart nations. Yet they are by no means poor in spirit. Indeed, Mark Twain was right : the English are mentioned in the Bible : " The meek shall inherit the earth."

The English never scrap an old institution, but enclose in the ancient framework the most modern methods. They think—and here they have been more profoundly influenced by the teachings of Jesus than they know—that good and evil must grow together until the final harvest. Nothing need be absolutely right or correct. Whatever serves the purpose is the thing to do.

They lay much store by fair play. An Englishman saw a German kicking a compatriot. "Stop that!" he cried.

"Why what's the matter?"

"You can't kick a man who is down."

"Then when am I to kick him?"

Of course this solicitude, which is admirable in every way, does not, unfortunately, extend to the peoples of the East. Their backs, many English feel, are made to be kicked. Burra-Sahibism is the root cause of the English troubles in the Orient.

The English like to reform everybody—except themselves. As Paul Morand has expended much Gallic wit on this pleasant trait, I need not linger over it.

The English vote for men, not for issues. They can afford to indulge in this luxury because there are no fundamental differences of opinion among them. They are very like-minded, and that is why Democracy is so successful in their country. But Democracy in England is certainly not "government of the people, by the people, for the people". That in practice would mean Zoocracy. The English are only too aware of that. At present they are ruled in a most complicated manner: it is difficult to say where the actual power resides: but we may be sure that, whatever political party happens to be in the saddle, rank and wealth have a big say in whatever happens. However, if I am not mistaken, the English ideal of

government is different : it is the rule of the best for the good of all. This has not yet been achieved, but the English are moving towards it by their usual path of trial-and-error.

A problem that has baffled almost every country is the problem of authority and liberty. The English have come nearest to solving it. They are at once orderly and independent-minded—that is, they do smilingly what custom and Law enjoin ; yet they are all free to say the thing they will. Of how many other peoples can we affirm the same ?

But enough ! Even if I wrote a book on English politics, which God forbid, I could not make them seem logical or credible. They are an aspect or extension, I suggest, of something far more complicated—English social life.

To this I now turn, for to understand it is to understand the English experiment.

### XIII

#### *SOCIAL LIFE*

WE were three at the lunch table. The talk, during coffee, turned to things of the mind. Presently, one of the party, an eminent churchman, said : “ Culture begins where civilization ends.” Then, after a meditative pause, he added : “ The tragedy of the West is that it has a high civilization but a rapidly declining culture.”

“ Quite so,” agreed the novelist. “ There is nothing so terrible as a brute armed with the latest weapons.”

We could appreciate the force of this remark, for, at that time, we were compelled to put up with the nocturnal serenade from Hitler.

However, the distinction between civilization and



culture is not always appreciated ; yet it is there. Civilization has to do with the material conditions of our life ; culture concerns itself with the intangible values.

Now, culture is a historically created design for living at a given period. It may be rational, irrational, or non-rational. On the other hand, it may be external or internal. By external I mean something that happens outside us, say, a man is run over by a car. Well, we must do something about it. That is a pattern for existence. By internal I understand our response to stimuli from within—that is, how we regulate our behaviour.

If this analysis is correct, then the English are, to my mind, the most cultured people in the world, with the possible exception of the best of the Chinese and the Indians.

Is this high praise ? I can only speak as I have found.

English culture is not a matter of refinements and subtleties and hair-splitting differences ; it is not even an added ornament, a passionate note in a passage, a trill in the song, the sigh of the wind among the roses. No, it has little to do with producing even masterpieces. Many countries excel England in such perceptions, but none, so far as I know, approaches the unity, symmetry, and stability of her social organization. It is here that the soul of England is most truly and fully expressed.

Is this obscure ? I wonder.

Most Westerners admire the ancient Greeks. Wonderful men, they say. Yet no less an authority than Flaubert has remarked that the children of Hellas were barbarians who happened to produce a few fine things. To me this is true, and I think the same

judgment may be passed upon some highly praised modern nations.

The fact is, genius can exist in a rotten country. There is, besides, such a thing as the phosphorescence of corruption. Anyhow, goodness and greatness are not the same thing.

The English, in my view, which by now will have become clear, are not in general an artistic people ; but they understand the art of life—the supreme art. They see that as the meaning of the earthly adventure. Take care of the tree, they tell us, and the flowers and fruits cannot be evil.

We may expand this thought. Here we are confronted with the vexed problem of means and ends. The English make sure of the means, which, without doubt, is the pledge of the higher morality, as Wordsworth would have agreed.

But to come down to earth. How do these people meet and mingle ?

There is in England, as everyone knows, Society with a capital S. Many silly things are said about it, both by foreigners and the unthinking at home ; but, after all, the social structure has its origins and is not without meaning and useful purpose. A conventional framework is a valuable element of stability.

Anyhow, the privileged in all countries have the same basis and understanding of one another. An Indian nobleman and an English nobleman have more in common with one another than with other classes of their respective countries. Even though they speak different languages, they have the same dialect of thought and feeling. Both do certain things in a certain way and express themselves in a certain manner. Wealth, prestige, and power are incidental ; the essential is the acceptance of responsibility with privilege.

It is true the English feel that their nobility is the only genuine nobility in the world. So do we Indians. We have aristocrats whose families were aristocratic before Cæsar landed in England. And, as the English are aware, Chinese family pride may be something inconceivable to the ordinary mind. I understand that the lineal descendant of Confucius is still somebody in modern China.

English Society is selective, rigid in its arbitrary code, above respectability, recognizing merit by patronizing it, blood and family alone giving permanent membership, and forming a caste, jealous and exclusive. I once asked a countess if she knew a certain well-known peer. "Not personally," she said; "I wouldn't touch him with a barge pole." And another titled woman said to me about this same countess: "I wouldn't pick her up with a pair of tongs!" Well, well. Lady Rhondda is right: there are only two countries that still possess the caste system—India and England. I remember lecturing on some religious subject at Bournemouth during the late war. My host asked at the end of my talk: "What about your caste system?"

"And what about yours, Sir John?"

He didn't ask any more questions.

But this is not the whole truth. English Society is wiser than the French or the Indian; it breaks its own rules to preserve itself, maintaining its vitality by marriage with beautiful women, the finest physical specimens from the stage or the world of sport.

In England, as elsewhere, there are still the "two nations", rich and poor, indicated by Disraeli, the differences since his time being in degree. The barrier, however, remains.

This barrier, in broad lines, exists in every country, but in England it seems to be accepted with crude

simplicity. An Englishman I have known travels first class, while his brother is compelled by his circumstances to travel third. If the two brothers are on the same journey they still retain their first class and third class compartments respectively. One has encountered a man who is accountant to an important borough corporation. His brother, a man equally presentable, is a police constable under the same corporation. They do not mix. It is as though the nation accepted socially a barrier imposed for special reasons by army discipline. During war-time an officer on the march catches sight of his own brother, a man of non-commissioned rank, passing in another corps. If they meet to exchange greetings, they retire for the purpose behind a shed where they are unobserved.

To us Indians this is a strange practice. With us blood prevails over social convention. The poor brother of a Prime Minister is still of the Prime Minister's family and his footing in the family will not be questioned. Valuation based upon the possession of worldly goods seems to us unworthy. Similarly with material and spiritual status. A maharaja or a millionaire would find it natural to abase himself before a saint, a seer, a thinker, or even a poet, though these might be carrying the beggar's bowl.

Iqbal, the thinker-poet of India, almost the equivalent of Goethe in Europe, was, socially, without standing ; yet, in virtue of his gift of song, he received the homage of prince and politician. (Not of the British official, though. In fact, while Afganistan, Persia, and Turkey hailed him as a master, the Governor of the Punjab, who lived in the same city, did not, I believe, know of his existence.)

To Rabindranath Tagore all India, including Gandhi, paid unquestioning homage, not on the ground of his social position, but because of his poetic gift.

How account, then, for the sympathy which in England holds these "two nations" and these classes together, preventing any conflict between them being pressed to a serious issue, like the revolutions in France and Russia? The explanation surely is the potential aristocrat which the average Englishman feels himself to be. He can see and feel himself in the position of the squire or duke.

Here I give the palm to the Englishman. The Indian, poor man, can rarely espy a conceivable passage from his own position to that of his material master. The English ideal is, or rather has been hitherto, to level up, and not down.

This fraternal feeling which prevails above superficial differences may arise from the sportsman's readiness to put himself in the other man's place, or, if you like, from the loftier teaching of the golden rule: "To do unto others as you would be done by." Here, as an Indian, I recognize a distinctive quality which my people might well respect as something not so instinctively appreciated by themselves.

The Englishman may pay lip service to the ideal of equality; he may be ready, especially under a Socialist régime, to give capacity some opportunity, so far as early handicaps permit, but he is not beguiled into thinking that all men are in fact equal. The social start still is generally decisive in the race.

There is freedom for those who can take it, who can, in truth, overcome the first difficulties. For proof we have our eminent politicians who began life as errand boys, living from hand to mouth. These men can rise as high as their ability and character deserve. As Palmerston said, a man who has the capacity to win a position can generally keep it.

The English give a bold man freedom to go out of bounds. He may inconvenience his family, or

neighbour, or even his country. This is part of the price the English pay to give free play to their passion for freedom. So that they have perhaps a larger proportion of eccentrics than any other community. Miss Edith Sitwell has fixed a number of such types in her book *English Eccentrics*. I did not believe in the reality of these until I met Mr. W. H., possibly the finest intelligence I have yet encountered in Europe. He had divined Einstein equally with Kant; he was a master in mathematics and physics, and though not a seaman, he taught university students navigation and naval engineering. He had a complete knowledge of English language and literature. He derided some of the greatest names in literature and science, and could give reasons for his contempt. Yet the man lived in a pig-sty, neglecting in personal affairs the simplest practical considerations. I have seen in his drawer uncashed cheques in bundles. By sheer carelessness of this kind he reduced himself, from time to time, to complete destitution. Often he had no food in the house, and, nonchalantly, accepted the charity of friends. For thirty years or more this man never went to bed, but slept in an armchair, and when illness caused him to be put to bed, by doctor's orders, he simply refused to get well or to leave his bed. An extreme example, no doubt, but this was an Englishman completely without self-discipline, who was tolerated by friends and associates for years.

He was English, I say, but I developed an affection for him to which he, strangely, responded. In his hospital bed he was beyond the control of nurses and lay immobile, refusing to speak to anyone until I appeared. Then his face cleared, he smiled a greeting, offered me a trembling hand, and began to talk—and what talk!

A student over many years, in several literatures,

I sat at his feet without question. All that I know of European philosophy or of the English spirit, I learnt from him. He dropped the seed, which fell on soil not, I hope, altogether barren. I now leave him with a grateful farewell.

And still with all this liberty I have seen an English aristocrat shake the dust of the country from his feet, and leave it with imprecations, calling England "a vast slum".

Personal intercourse in such a community shows every form of inconsistency. Your squire has so much in common, as a man, with his gardener or his game-keeper that he generally keeps his distance and avoids too familiar address. In contrast, your German Junker may be found drinking his beer in a public place with a workman, not because of any special brotherly sympathy, but with the same remoteness as he might fondle his dog. Neither he nor the workman would feel that they were of the same clay. They could not mix, and no complication need be guarded against.

An English friend, a writer but proud to be a miner's son, put it to me in this way : ". . . No author, I care not who he is, can possibly understand us without understanding the tin chapel and the pub, their natural relationship to each other, their indispensability in the tradition, and (however outrageous the suggestion may be to you as an Indian) the sole hope of this country and for human freedom everywhere. These things cannot be gathered from literature qua literature ; they are not academic, they belong to the blood of a strange but generous people. . . ."

This I have seen myself. In an English country pub the squire will sit down to his drink with a labourer and argue the topic of the hour without any observance being shown of the difference in social station between the two ; but, in fact, neither forgets the wide gulf

that remains in the essential conditions of their lives. The workman has not to be reminded, for he never presumes upon the good-natured contact over a drink.

The tin chapel signifies the essence of the miner's, and it maybe also the squire's, ultimate sanctions. It is the influence of the English Bible again.

In my country, I am bound to say, no such situation is known, nor within the confines of India could it be imagined. Between one class and another the separation is that of two worlds. So far, this is our great fault and perhaps our greatest drawback. If by any form of education in the future Indian groups and castes can acquire the sense of fraternity that I have seen throughout England, the most intractable problem of Indian government will be solved.

Perhaps without too great a digression I may put another aspect of English solidarity that is conspicuously absent in India. It is the attitude of the man who wishes to be reasonable, or, if you prefer, sportsman-like. "Be fair." I hear it everywhere. A man in any station of life may fervently disagree with another's case, but he will try to see from behind the other's eyes. Anyone of natural ability, stimulated by popular education, exercises a sense of responsibility by putting himself in the other man's shoes, even if the other man is in control. This co-operation between government and people cuts across party and even to some extent across the frontiers of the rich and poor, and becomes part of the English interpretation of democracy. It is the essence of the civic conscience.

Here is a confirmation—if we needed one—of the suggestion already made that English politics are a natural growth of a many-sided national character, and not an attempt to assume a defined ideology.

Gibbon has said that it is possible to judge a nation by its laws, and in this he supports my argument.



Not that all the laws are always and everywhere obeyed, but they contain the nation's history and its ideals. The best are still striven for as the ultimate goal ; the worst fall into desuetude.

Judged by its laws, English polity ranks with that of any other nation. Many would hold with me that it is supreme.

Do I seem unconscious of the defects in English social life? I am well aware of them, but hitherto I have put forward the characteristics that seem to be dominant and to have decided England's place in the world.

In the nature of things even " God's Englishman " partakes of our common human frailty. It would not need a prejudiced foreigner to find him riddled with social faults. In spite of all his fraternal ideals, he is an incorrigible snob. Mere society affectations of this kind may be as trivial and outmoded as the Order of the " old school tie ". It is in their current assertions of privilege among our new masters that one is reminded the Englishman has the old Adam still to contend with. No class, no profession, no occupation is exempt. The industrialist or the literary man may provide the worst example. Pride of place is always ready to elbow out the weaker brother. We shall not look for regeneration, therefore, to the socialization of any trade or activity. The weakness can be uprooted only as fast as original sin can be modified.

But original sin persists, in its lighter aspects adding to our merriment, though, at its worst, it saddens us. The Hon. K., when I asked him how he was getting on at Oxford, was a little downcast. " They look upon me, you see," he explained, " as a Scot, and not as one of themselves." But the balance can be readily redressed by Scottish pride. A friend of mine engaged a new maid and, a day or two later, her

mistress heard that she was a Scotswoman. "Why, Mary, you are Scottish? You did not tell me." "No, ma'am," said the maid, "I didn't like to boast."

An Englishman at Oxford or Cambridge, associating with an Asiatic of his own social rank, would find his imperfect English accent nothing against him, while the speech of a lad from Glasgow or Birmingham would make him turn away in dismay.

These differences of accent are indeed among the most inexcusable grounds of separation. Eminent men may have emphasized for purposes of popular appeal their native accent or lack of aitches, but on the lower levels they carry an unhappy sense of superiority or its opposite.

There is no denying that in England a man's accent betrays him, and by it he is judged. It is right or wrong, yours or not yours.

But let us enter an English home. To be sure, there are variations which will be principally seen in scale and degree, but there is a pattern that is common to all.

Who is the boss of the house? Exceptions apart, it is undoubtedly the husband. He is the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, but, in a reasonably happy home, his wife is unquestioned Home Minister. It would be uncomfortable to invite to the house anyone of whom she disapproves.

But her functions are strictly limited to domestic affairs: how the meals should be prepared, how they should be served, what servants, if any, should be employed—all these are in her sphere. But very often she does not know what her husband earns. Here the French or Indian woman may smile superiorly; for she knows to the last penny what her husband possesses. Which arrangement is better invites a difference of opinion. Personally, I should say that the double check exercised by a woman (whose grasp of small detail is

often superior to her husband's) is a valuable safeguard against extravagance and worse. How often has a man got into difficulties and attempted to cover them up by gambling, borrowing, or other imprudent means, and then become afraid to disclose to his wife his true position until it is too late ! Follows insolvency and possibly serious upheaval in the family affairs. The future of the children will generally be decided, for the sons by the father's occupation, and for the daughters by their qualities and the family circumstances—all with endless variations, depending on the social stratum to which the family belongs. A conspicuous example of the differences was made public by Sir Edward Carson, who related that his son on leaving school had informed him : " Father, I am going into the Navy."

" Nonsense ! " said Sir Edward, " you are going to the Bar and make a lot of money."

" No, father, you see, Great Britain and the Empire depend upon the Navy."

" Well, my boy, if you put it that way, there is nothing more to be said."

I am paraphrasing, but that is the substance of the tale which had its sequel in a story told to the House of Commons of an act of gallantry by a young naval officer in command of a submarine. Individuality breaks through all my rules.

Many of the new generation, in India or in England, may not have heard the story of John Burns, which would perhaps surprise a French housewife. In his early days he told a working class audience that no man was worth more than five hundred pounds a year ; when he became a Minister a member of his audience asked him what he did with the balance of his salary. " Ask my wife," said the ready speaker.

Assuming, as I must, for I cannot know, that English

marriages are as often as not the natural sequel to a true love affair, it seems a fair generalization that the Englishman marries what he or his family believes to be a suitable partner. Yet it remains true that tradition prevails. The French are prudent above all things ; they have built their social life upon the family, which has depended for generations upon the system of the *dot*.

In India, where tradition, however it may be in flux, is still a most powerful social influence, family marries family. England, on the other hand (and, of course, still more America), is the country of the individual, where a man makes his own life. Here, all said and done, romance, so often not to be distinguished from caprice, plays a larger part.

Of what the Latin or the ancient Greek has called the art of love the Englishman knows little. In love he is unskilled, and perhaps he is not expected to cultivate skill, but if the break comes he knows more than the others of loyalty, decency, and affectionate consideration. A Frenchwoman, as a visitor in England, has been frank and revealing. She said to a friend of mine : " A Frenchman has no true delicacy of feeling. In five minutes, when with any woman who has attracted him, he has made love to her, and he is ' making love ' for the moment only. And it may be said in his defence that he is not a hypocrite, for he pretends nothing more."

But this topic, though inseparable from an attempt to study English home life, is distasteful to me. It is part of the imponderable, infinitely variable expressions of character. Anyhow, there is no problem of sex except in the delicacy of the conception.

Wherein, however, consists the centre and spring of English domesticity? It is in the autonomy of the individual. The husband is not merely a husband ;

he is a member of a church, of a club, of a trades union, in innumerable ways contributing to the democratic government of his country. And more and more his wife is taking her place beside him, interested in her M.P., who may become a Minister, even though a woman.

Normally, the relationship of husband and wife is one of affection and confidence ; but that invincible English reserve may cause a difficulty even here. A man is capable of pride or mere vanity that may be pricked by incidents so trifling that he will not stop to reveal the cause. The result is confusion and suspicion under which a molehill becomes a mountain. In India, though they might go far enough to be irritating, such reserves would be broken by explanation before they could become dangerous. For this reason, the Englishwoman is generally on the alert, and perhaps, in consequence, cultivates a more acute perception and a higher sensibility.

The woman of France or of India takes her husband for granted, which, of course, can be, to a sensitive spirit, most annoying.

English children, so far as one may distinguish them from others, are noticeable for their freedom which, because they are children, will not be condemned as bad manners. If a visitor is unfortunate enough to have a conspicuous feature, which need not be so marked as a black-eye or a deformed ear, he may be asked suddenly for an explanation even in a drawing-room. Often no doubt the question will be suppressed and the child removed, but the tendency remains.

A belle a few years old, such as cannot be grown elsewhere, being of fairy lightness, with flaxen hair, blue eyes, and classic features, paused before me suddenly in a Kensington garden and asked : " Why is your skin so brown ? " But all in the same moment

she radiated so much love of life, in which I was included, that a thought of offence had no time to be formed.

English children, I find, are allowed to be themselves, and thus in their innocence show a grace of manner no mere adult code of conduct could teach them. Of course they are taught to behave themselves, but not frightened into an unnatural restraint. The French say to their children : "Soi sage." The English invariably utter : "Be good." The difference blossoms, on the one side, in the search for rightness, or, let us admit it, in hypocrisy ; on the other, in an artificial bearing which is indeed elaborately polite or gallant, but not necessarily sincere or considerate.

But one thing has always shocked me : why do some English, as we know, treat their children so badly ? Is not the very existence of an N.S.P.C.C. evidence of the evil ? Not so long ago I was in the house of a miner in the north of England. A child whimpered, and before I could find an explanation it screamed under the kicks of its own father's boot. A moment later the man's dog entered the room and was given half his master's steak. I should say myself that the charitable view to take is that the miner's dangerous daily fight for his living sometimes destroys sensibility and leaves him an unconscious brute. The general poverty in this country, which is as extreme as its wealth but more widely spread, is the most degrading influence.

And yet, and yet : I hesitate. The material misery of India is vast and soul-destroying : we all know that : still, I have rarely seen, although I know such things exist, even a beggar-woman ill-treating her child.

It would be possible to write a thick tome on English social life, just because there are almost as many

gradations as there are families. But one thing is common : for every group in the community, large or small, there is a code and it is not broken. A distinguished agitator, a countryman of mine, after spending a few months in England, was asked by another Indian what he now thought of the hated English. "I hate the British Raj as much as I ever did," he said, "and I would do anything I could to rid my country of it ; but as for the English people, I forgive them everything for their twilight and their queues."

There you may find the key to many contradictory appearances. That twilight, with its mellowed gradations, will help you to understand nuances of psychology that are hard to find elsewhere, and the queues, self-controlled, may suggest how so many strident individualities live together.

In their social structure the English reach the height of their adventure with life, and it is as much in tribute to this achievement as in criticism that I say there is still scope for a more finished cultivation of their garden. There are many deep adjustments to be made before English society becomes again a contented unit. Will it be a peaceful process ? If not ? I am reminded of Chesterton's lines, which I give more as a warning than a true fear

Smile at us, pay us, but do not quite forget ;  
For we are the people of England, that never have  
spoken yet.  
There is many a fat farmer that drinks less cheerfully,  
There is many a free French peasant who is richer and  
sadder than we.  
There are no folk in the world so helpless or so wise.  
There is hunger in our bellies, there is laughter in our  
eyes ;  
You laugh at us and love us, both mugs and eyes are wet :  
Only you do not know us. For we have not spoken yet.

We hear men speaking for us of new laws strong and sweet,  
 Yet is there no man speaketh as we speak in the street.  
 It may be we shall rise the last as Frenchmen rose the first,  
 Our wrath come after Russia's wrath and our wrath be the worst.  
 It may be we are meant to mark with our riot and our rest  
 God's scorn for all men governing. It may be beer is best.  
 But we are the people of England ; and we have not spoken yet.  
 Smile at us, pay us. But do not quite forget.

This is poster-poetry, if you like, but it enshrines a deep truth. The great masses of England have not spoken yet. They are still dazed and only half-aware. They are on the whole honest, God-fearing persons, but let us not forget their "invincible anger". It flares up when we least expect it. Kipling noted this trait, and was terrified by it. The fact is, the English are "a secret people"—living volcanoes under an ice-bound plain.

#### XIV

#### THE ENGLISH SOUL

SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND was fully convinced that each nation had a distinctive soul. I mentioned this a little while ago to a friend, a scientist. He smiled and said : "What do you mean by the soul of a nation ?"

"Its psyche, its vital principle."

"Words, words, words."

I tried again. "By the soul of a nation," I said, "I understand its *mores*—that is, the sum-total of its behaviour."



"In that case there is nothing to quarrel about. There is such a thing as the *mores*, or collective attitude, of a people. Only it is not easy to define it ; it changes from time to time. To-day, for instance, we English couldn't found an Empire. We haven't got the guts of our ancestors."

"Perhaps you are more civilized now."

He said something unprintable. However, the point is that Sir Francis was right : each nation has (let us not jib at the word) a soul of its own.

Personally, I always see France as a woman. She has only her wish and will. It is a waste of time to argue with her. But, you ask, what about her passion for logic ? That, I am afraid, is a mere shield, like John Bull's sense of humour. France is *au fond* emotional. No wonder she is called Marianne.

John Bull reminds me of England. Here we have to do with a man. England is masculine. No doubt about that. But the soul of the country is not easy to find. What is the difficulty ?

The English soul, like the English language, is a patchwork. We see this or that bit, but the whole escapes us. No wonder the English are, with the exception of us Indians, the most mysterious people in the world. Each observer sees a part, and judges accordingly.

I have tried to describe as best I could those aspects of the English soul that were perceptible to me. Undoubtedly I have neglected or overlooked some important ones. That, alas, cannot be helped. One can look only with such eyes as one possesses. And, as Charles Péguy said, it is not easy to see what one does see. Seeing, the artists tell us, is an art.

A characteristic of the English that makes them incomprehensible to the Continental mind is their contempt for logic (an abstract quality) and preference

for what works in actual life. Someone has described them as a people who make their principles suit their interests, which is getting at the same idea from a more unflattering point of view. It is better to say that the English are a people whose pride has always been to sacrifice their friends for their enemies. It is their desire to be fair that makes them think that if they load the dice against themselves and their well-wishers they are more likely to be just !

It is sometimes possible to hit off entire groups of people in a few words. The Scotsman, for instance, is the man who keeps the Sabbath, and everything else he can lay his hands on. The Irishman is the man who most firmly believes what he knows to be untrue. The Welshman prays on his knees all Sunday, and on his neighbours all the week.

These are Father Dolling's definitions, not mine. How far they are true it is not for me to say.

The point is that the English cannot be summed up in a witty phrase. They are too complex for that. We have to examine them bit by bit.

That the English have a monocular vision cannot be denied. They think that what they have produced is the best in the world. Nothing can shake this conviction.

This is not to say that the English will not praise this or that foreign object or sight. They do it gladly. What rapturous things they have said about Greece and Italy ! Still, in their heart of hearts they know that what England possesses is unrivalled. I have met only one man who said that he would like to die in India, and that was Sir Thomas Arnold. J. M. Robertson told me that it would be glorious to lie under a tree in the shadow of the Himalaya and breathe one's last. Quickly he added : " But perhaps it would be too cold. I prefer to pass away here."

The hold of England on the English is terrific. It was Rupert Brooke who spoke of his body as

A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam.

There is, then, an indissoluble bond between the land and its children. It is in a sense a primal covenant. In fact, the English are what their country has made them. When they go abroad they always carry England in their hearts. The image creates a paradisaal spot for them in the midst of raging hell or indescribable chaos.

England is an island, and so is every English man or woman an island. Nothing can shake these people. They remain imperturbable amid the eddies and whirlpools of contemporary life. Strange gods come ; strange cults arise ; but the English do not abase themselves before these, nor adore. They know that the reign of the new idols will be as ephemeral as those of the past. For themselves, "standing," they "look to the end".

It is very soothing to live among the English. Unhurried, unworried—that is their general attitude. And being still, they instil their stillness into others.

To-day, for instance, because of the atomic bomb, most Western nations are jittery. Even great America is ill at ease. Has she perchance created a Frankenstein monster ? But the English go about as though God's in his heaven and all's right with the world.

I was deeply impressed by the behaviour of the English Consul at Bordeaux in June, 1940. The Germans were said to be approaching, yet he went on with his work, as he had said he would, until 2 p.m. At the exact stroke of the hour he stamped the last passport, clutched his hat, and disappeared.

The English climate has had a deep influence upon

the English. Their Spring has taught me two things : the people's passion for life—especially the period of youth ; and their natural liking for nuances. They never see things in black and white, but always in their real or approximate colours. English life and behaviour are, in truth, all a matter of shades. " This isn't done " is ever on their lips. It is a question of subtle differences between the right and the wrong, between the licit and the illicit. " One ray the more, one ray the less "—this guides them in everything, even in international affairs. In a word, conduct may or may not be three-fourths of life, but it is for many English a matter of grave import.

The English have something of the indolence and passionateness of their summer. Behind a correct or cold exterior they hide a warm and sometimes even a fierce heart. When they take fire they do not burn softly, but blaze like a torch. Their reserve, of which we hear so much, has turned into a national habit from a suspicion that their feelings may become stronger than their reason can justify. But this emotional incandescence does not last : the sea breezes soon cool it. A long voyage is generally the prescription of the unhappy or the love-lorn English. But they always return to their home surroundings. Autumn, with its fairy tints, teaches them that " ripeness is all ". Then the long winter makes them create in the world a little world of their own. Here a few things suffice : comfortable armchairs ; a leaping fire ; a cup of tea or a glass of wine ; someone you love or who loves you ; a few loyal friends or a favourite book. Yes, the English can often do with a room without a view.

The sea ! The English owe a great deal to the sea. Its tang and its music have become one with their spirits. I remember a talk I once had with a tea-planter from Ceylon. He was a fellow-passenger on

the same boat. Among other interesting things he said : " It was not the lure of money that took me to the East—that was only by the way. I was led there, as so many of my countrymen are, by the spirit of adventure. There's something in our blood that will not let us rest : we have to do things. It is a poor little world at its grandest, and we like to make the best of it." I at once thought of Elizabeth's admirals. Yes, the English have been activists ever since. They like to do something, no matter what. That is perhaps the deepest note of their being. The pensioned, the guaranteed, the safety-first kind of existence has little appeal for them. I have seen a man of eighty studying beetles at the Natural History Museum. Tchehov is reported to have said : " To be happy one must be perfectly lazy or idle." The English can't understand that. They are great believers in action. They say : " Any decision is better than none." Here they score over the French, who can never make up their minds about anything. Of course, the English are sometimes given to vain agitation. Mere restlessness is no virtue. I have known English men and women who have given up good jobs for no better reason than that they want a change. Often these people, instead of going up, go down, and are not at all worried. There are others who can stick to nothing, and, like Old Man River, keep rolling along.

It must be admitted that few English understand that passivity is itself a kind of activity. However, as a people, they are not reckless. Even when they take a plunge they do so calmly. Trial and error is ever their method. Their view is not bounded by the possible ; they know, on the contrary, that it is generally the impossible that happens. So—because they are practical and commonsensical—they take chances that would terrify more calculating nations.

Mr. Churchill's brave defiance of Hitler in 1940 is a case in point. And a few years ago Mr. Brenden Bracken told hard-headed business men that "it is dangerous not to take risks". I detect in it the wisdom of the sea and the wisdom of the Turf.

The English are spiritual gamblers. We must never forget that. But why are they gamblers? Perhaps because they have an unreasoning faith in their destiny. They are convinced that they are being looked after. And they see the pishah-height.

The English are, by and large, unpoeitical; yet they have produced the finest poetry in Europe. How are we to account for this? Laurence Binyon gave me this explanation. "It is," he said, "due to the spirit of contrariety." That doesn't seem to be the whole truth. Is not English poetry to some extent a release of that passion which, we have suggested, has been pent up by their habit of reserve? Further, it looks to me almost impossible for a sensitive Englishman not to be a poet. His country brings him all the elements of poetry. "There's night and day, brother, both sweet things; there's sun, moon, and stars, brother, all sweet things; likewise there's a wind on the heath." George Borrow's blind philosopher spoke for all his compatriots.

The English were called by Napoleon a nation of shopkeepers; and many in the world hold the same view. It is all wrong. The English are not good at shopkeeping. As a matter of fact, they are more eager to buy than to sell. There is nothing of the *doigts crouchus* about them.

But they are practical, eminently practical, and know on which side their bread is buttered. Wordsworth, for example, while moaning melodiously in sonnets about the desecration of the countryside by the railways, inquired of knowledgeable friends in

which railways stocks it was wisest to invest his money. This is not hypocrisy. Far from it. One can loathe a thing and yet wish to make the best of it. Why not? A friend of mine, an artist, told me: "I can't sell any of my portraits. Rotten luck! But, thank God, I have made a tidy sum by dealing in real estate." A painter and a business man—the combination is to be found in England.

Years ago Clifford Bax said to me: "The Englishman is part Puritan, part cavalier." This is so. Some things the English abhor, and will hardly mention; other things they will do in a most delicate manner. There is in them the grimness of the Puritan linked with the grace of the cavalier.

Soldier and saint—quite a common phenomenon in England. Think of General Gordon.

Pascal said: "La justice sans la force est une vanité." The English will agree, only adding that power that is sure of itself always wears velvet gloves. Isabella, in *Measure for Measure*, expresses their general feeling

O, it is excellent  
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous  
To use it like a giant.

The English are not a martial, but a military, race. That is to say, they have ceased to believe in the "pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war". Indeed, they do not like uniforms, and even resent them. Yet when they are engaged in a fight they fight to the bitter end. They are slow to rouse, but once roused they will never let go—the characteristic of the bulldog.

And they have staying power, which means that they always win the last battle, or, at least, have done so hitherto.

They just don't know when they are beaten. This might appear to some merely a form of blindness, but it is in reality an excellent virtue. "A lost battle," said Foch, "is a battle which one thinks one has lost." Going on, in spite of all difficulties, is the secret of English success.

"Faith moves mountains." The English believe that with all their heart and soul. But faith in what? The English will be hard put to it to answer this question. I don't suppose the Deity enters into it. We Indians, taken in the lump, doubt everything, including ourselves. The English are just the opposite. They are sure perhaps of too many things—including their capacity to put the world right. Here they are, strangely enough, more Buddhist than they know. It was Sakya-Muni who said that we are shaped by our thoughts.

The English think that they are a chosen people. "God," wrote Milton, "is decreeing to begin some new and great period. What does he then but reveal Himself to His servants, and as his manner is, first to his Englishmen." Unfortunately, some other nations have an equally high opinion of themselves. It was Charles Péguy who made God speak thus

Our Frenchmen—they are my favourite witnesses ;  
 They go ahead by themselves more than the others.  
 They go ahead and are themselves more than the others.  
 Among all men they are free and among all gratuitous.  
 You don't have to tell them the same thing twice over.  
 Before you are through talking, they have understood.  
 Hard working people.  
 Before you are through talking, the work is done.  
 Military people.  
 Before you are through talking, the battle is begun—  
 It is very annoying, says God, when there are no more  
 Frenchmen.  
 Well, there are things that I do, and nobody will be  
 there to understand them.



French people, the peoples of the earth call you light-headed.

Because you are quick.

The Pharisee peoples call you light-headed

Because you are a quick people.

And so it goes on for many lines. The Germans, as we know, have a pretty good conceit of themselves. So, for that matter, have the Chinese. However, the English differ from others in that they have acted upon their belief with perhaps a gambler's faith. Anyhow, to my mind, they are reaching towards their ideal.

Why, they have even turned their defects into shining qualities. Take, for instance, their famous phlegm. It is really a weakness. The English react to things slowly. Naturally, even when they are bewildered, they do not show it at once. This produces an impression of self-mastery or strength in repose ! But their unflurried habit gives them time to stoke up the fire of decision.

The English avoid getting into conversation with strangers. Often in trains they sit quiet or read a book or newspaper. One would think that they were haughty or reserved or at least unsociable.

A very false estimate. The fact is, the English are afraid of being done and fear also that they may not be taken at their true value. Even more powerful in them is a pride which will not seek contact, but is willing to respond to another's advances. That is, when the ice is broken or they have been properly introduced. I would go farther and say that they can be too trustful, the reverse side perhaps of the shield of courage. They are afraid of being afraid.

The easiest way to reduce the English is to poke fun at them. That they cannot take. It unsettles their belief in themselves.

It is for the same reason that the English laugh at

others. If you find everybody else funny, well, you cannot yourself be funny. Excellent logic. I think Turgenev has a wise word on that in one of his sketches. If you have a weakness, he says, point to it in everybody else, and you will remain immune.

The English are gregarious, and are never so happy as when they are among their own kind, or, rather, among people of their own station. An English workman is terribly *gené* in the company of educated people. The other way round is not true. However, it is instructive to visit an English pub. Here the class distinctions, though not watertight, are fairly rigorous. People who patronize the Public Bar wouldn't dream of patronizing the Saloon Bar. This surprises, nay scandalizes, the Continentals, especially the French. But to the English it is a matter of course.

Except some philosophers, poets, and eccentrics, the English hate to be alone, afraid, no doubt, to meet the unknown in themselves. That is one reason why they are the least introspective of peoples. Here we have loss and gain. If their understanding is less, their faith remains undisturbed.

During the late war I saw several acts of heroism. Common people behaved splendidly. Yet I am bound to say that many of them were too often tight. A witty English friend tells me that the British Navy floats on beer. Why leave out the Army and the Air Force? It isn't fair. A. E. Housman was right

Oh many a peer of England brews  
Livelier liquor than the Muse,  
And malt does more than Milton can  
To justify God's ways to man.  
Ale, man, ale's the stuff to drink  
For fellows whom it hurts to think :  
Look into the pewter pot  
To see the world as the world's not.

"In vino veritas." The English believe that. If

they are happy they drink ; if they are unhappy they drink ; they always drink. The bowl, they feel, is the face of a friend.

I have dwelt on these small matters because it is the tiny touches that reveal character and convey the secret of a people's personality.

Shakespeare has written in *The Tempest* (the words are put in the mouth of Trinculo) : " Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver : there would this monster make a man ; any strange beast there makes a man : when they would not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they would lay out ten to see a dead Indian." Much of this indictment is still true. The English are curious. Stop on the pavement and gaze at a chimney, and a crowd will collect. Say that you see a monkey there, and ten to one many will agree with you. There is a word for all this : " rubber-necks." But let us be fair. This idle gazing has its own element of vitality, for it is a search for new adventure.

But the English of to-day certainly give more than a doit to a lame beggar—any beggar, provided that he makes a lot of noise with some musical instrument. If he simply asks for alms he is, as the saying goes, " put in jug." I asked for enlightenment on this curious type of philanthropy. The reply was : " We don't like to see our people begging. If they must do it, well, then, they must give the appearance of being entertainers. It is more respectable." The result of all this is that English beggars often make more than able-bodied workmen !

Here is another peculiarity of the English. They don't mind offering you any number of drinks, but, even though you be starving, it will never occur to them to buy you a meal.

But the English are generous. Talk of Chinese children dying of hunger, and ask for money, and it will be given to you. Of course, if you speak of converting the heathen, there is a rain of half-crowns or even ten-shilling notes. The English will go to much expense to save the soul of anyone—especially if the person in question lives in the back of beyond. Old ladies, I have noticed, are particularly lavish with their money on this kind of work.

In fact, England is the hope of lost causes. You can plead for anything, and are sure to get some help. There are societies to succour Jews ; societies to succour Negroes ; societies to succour criminals ; and societies to succour cats, dogs, birds, and what not. But, so far as I know, there is no society to succour the English. The well-bred and the artistically-inclined are allowed to starve in silence. For them there was always the dole and the workhouse, until quite recent times. But the majority of the English people are to-day better off than they have ever been before. A redistribution of wealth is quietly taking place. This is fine ; the only snag is that the wealthier families are disappearing one by one. Perhaps in the future—not the too distant future—England will become a land of comrades. This will not be an unmixed blessing ; for there is much to be said for the aristocratic virtues. Uniformity, as Vivekananda said, is death.

Hope, confidence, fair play—these are specifically English words. Hope leads them to believe that things will be transformed, for they have seen them transformed. Confidence means for them that they have to rely upon themselves. The gods help those who help themselves. Fair-play makes them tolerant towards their enemies—at least when they are beaten.

England is not a Gangster-Nation. In fact, she is more nearly the ideal good neighbour.

For the English, the thoughtful English, the most vexed of modern problems is the problem of beastliness in the world. Although matter-of-fact, and with their ears to the ground, they refuse to believe that cruelty can be the law of life, that greed is the only motive that moves man, and that wars are inevitable. The word civilized does not mean the same thing to the English that it means to other Western nations. It has nothing to do with food, clothes, or the comforts of life. It confines itself to human relations. The more delicately adjusted these are, the English think, the more civilized we are. Personally, I agree.

The English cannot live in a world where freedom of thought and expression—within limits, of course—are taboo. The determinism of the Russian seems to them equally horrible. It is, they feel, like the life of a white ant or slug.

When the English encounter odd ways of life and thought they smile pityingly. But they rarely interfere. "Let sleeping dogs lie" is their motto.

To understand the English soul we must have a taste for mellow things. These people are wise and gentle. They build everything on the human scale. Their novels, their poems, their plays, their pictures, their architecture, their music do not terrify or astonish. They charm and create a feeling of cosiness.

Whatever the English make—from a cathedral to a spinning top—is designed for the use of man. It is in its essence functional as well as symbolic. It is not so ethereal as to be too good for human nature's daily food. Compare the English country house with the French château.

England sits upon the earth with a weight that can be felt. It is fully subject to the laws of gravitation. India and France seem light in space and time. But England, though moored to this planet, is not

unmindful of the moral law within and the starry heavens above.

Immersed in the dance of plastic circumstance, England seeks eternity through time. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"—such is her belief. To live from day to day is her attitude.

The writers of England, unlike those of France or Russia, do not thrust their instruments into the crannies of the human soul. That seems to them indelicate. They prefer the surface view, feeling that the soul can reveal itself in the colour of the skin or in the sparkle of the eye. After all, appearance is reality itself if we can read the signs. The sheen and fragrance of a rose petal are the very meaning of the rose's existence.

Who can measure the proportion of cosmic energy that England holds? The English never speak of it. It is not a question of modesty; it is part of their reverence for the unseen forces. England, I believe, does not wish to be considered terrible or fraternal. Both are labels of limitation. She desires to be respected for herself without having to present credentials. She displays her power not in composing a book, not in laying out a garden, not in creating a cathedral, not in developing a theory, but in making life more livable. She is, if you like, the teacher of the world. "Manners makyth man." This is a maxim which, with the English, is more than a social grace; it is a principle inspired largely by another dictum of Bacon's: "The greater a soul the greater its compassion." How else can we explain English tolerance and English refusal to cherish revenge?

Personally, I owe England a debt impossible to repay. She has taught me that by valuing the past more and more exquisitely we can make it the divine present and that a life shaped by beauty and goodness

is the only creed that matters. Existence in England has shown me the meaning of patriotism, so that through England's eyes I admire my country more than when I left it. Beyond all this, England has given me selfless friendships of a quality I have not found elsewhere.

In England, I confess, I found my limits. It is good to fly ; it is good to range the world ; it is good to explore heaven and earth ; but it is best of all to remain human and humane. The height of the earth, as a Martian might call it, that only the English have attained.

If I were not an Indian, I should choose to have been born English ; for among these people I have found my own soul. Perhaps, indeed, this is one of the special gifts of England to the stranger : to convince him of the uniqueness of the individual and so to recognize his value as a separate being.

I could go on for ever, but what is the use ? Finality is death, or it is non-existence. Be still, be still, my soul, and let the darkness come upon you with its rest and peace and hope. Hope ? Yes. Oh why do friendly sunbeams toil if not to break earth into new life ?

That is the last word of the English soul. Here is wisdom enough for now and for all time.

## XV

### *EAST AND WEST*

IN 1933, speaking before the Royal Society of Literature and the India Society, I said

Human nature, we are told, is the same everywhere. This is a dictum that usually passes unchallenged ; but let us see what it means. What is this "sameness" that is

referred to? Apparently the allusion is to certain attributes that are supposed to be the common possession of all men in virtue of their being members of the human family. The more we examine this supposition the more disputable we find it. It is true that man has the same bodily organism wherever we encounter him and that he responds to his environment. But beyond this we cannot go. We realize that the "average" human being of every race does not respond uniformly to given external conditions. It is not true in the world of sense; still less true is it in the world of emotional reactions; and even less true is it in the world of thought. For instance, the sensations of colour are notoriously different as we pass from man to man. And then the spectacle of suffering may evoke either sympathy or indifference or even, as a German proverb has it, extreme pleasure. Finally, the manner in which men "think things"—that is, classify and conceptualize them—is most obviously an acquirement from ancestry and environment. This is at once seen when we compare languages, literatures, religions, the arts of social life, and the pursuit of æsthetic and other ideals. Men vary by a whole heaven in all these things.

It might be urged that "human nature" is the original quantity  $x$ —that is, man minus civilization. But this gives us the remainder zero, or the kernel of Peer Gynt's onion

What an enormous number of swathings!

Isn't the kernel soon coming to light?

I'm blest if it is! To the innermost centre

'Tis nothing but swathings—each smaller and smaller—  
Nature is witty!

Yes—but also tantalizingly obscure. Man, wherever we come across him, is known to us only as an *acquired nature*. Of his supposed original nature we know nothing. It is one of Bacon's *Idola Fori*. Indeed, "the instincts and faculties of different men," said an acute observer, Francis Galton, "differ in a variety of ways almost as profoundly as those of animals in different cages of the Zoological Gardens." Such is the fact. We shall do well to bear it in mind.

I have quoted from myself for two reasons: first, because the words contain a truth that many sentimentalists are apt to forget; and, secondly, because



I was at that time no less a Blimp than Kipling.  
I wished to prove philosophically that

East is East, and the West is West  
And never the twain shall meet.

I succeeded in my aim better than I had expected ; for a number of eminent European artists and critics took my pronouncement rather solemnly. There was, they agreed after reading my *Shakespeare through Eastern Eyes*, a fundamental opposition between East and West.

Soon, however, I discovered that I was not so right as I had fondly imagined. The first doubt was thrown in my mind by Thomas Whittaker, the well-known Neo-Platonist scholar, who roundly declared that he had more in common with me than he had with Bernard Shaw or H. G. Wells ! A greater shock was given me by Romain Rolland. He asked me to compare the spiritual experiences of East and West. "You will find," he said, "that we are all members of one another. Any differences that are there are merely differences of behaviour and expression."

I investigated the problem of East and West with all the thoroughness of which I was capable. The results were startling. Here, in rough outline, is a part of what I discovered.

East and West have been meeting and mingling long before the time of Alexander the Great. From Thales to Plato, from the Gnostics to the Neo-Platonists, from Schopenhauer to Count Keyserling, from Victor Hugo to Paul Valéry, from Tolstoy to Maxim Gorky, from Blake to Aldous Huxley, the Occident has been deeply influenced by the thought of India. And the opposite is only slightly less true.

However, even if we ignore the interaction of Eastern and Western thought, we have to admit a certain parallelism of vision, due, I suppose, to racial

affinities. India and the Occident, despite real and seeming differences, envisage many things in the same light.

This is particularly true when we compare England and India. Some of the secret élans of the two peoples are almost identical. Though centuries divide Kalidasa from Shakespeare, the two poets contemplate life and love in the same way. Both, in the end, seem satisfied with the grand simplicities—open air, magic, moonlight, the charmed world of the little people. And both adore flowers. Indeed, by going through the work of the subtlest and deepest English (also American) writers, it would be possible to show that they have more in common with Indians than they have, say, with the French or even the Germans. This consideration makes Indo-English differences, no matter of what sort, a matter of minor import. The two peoples were created, if such an expression may be permitted, to march hand in hand towards those shining heights where “God himself is sun and moon”.

It was during the Renaissance, and only from that time, that a gulf arose between East and West. This was simply due to the birth of aggressive individualism in Europe. No doubt we owe to it the rise of science and all that it connotes. But the linkage between East and West, which had withstood the test of many centuries, was suddenly destroyed. In modern times the two have drifted further and further apart ; and this is to the disadvantage of the West.

Such, anyhow, is the thesis of Rene Guénon, the brilliant French scholar and thinker. We may respect his contention without wholly subscribing to it. He seems to think that the Westernization of the Orient, especially of India, is a calamity.

I venture to disagree. I believe that the East had

to be awakened from its age-long sleep. Science is nothing if not universal ; and it is, in the last analysis, a temper, a frame of mind. It may be equated with the spirit of free inquiry.

English influence on India, through Western education and other channels, has been tremendous. But what is worth noting is that it has created a new type of man—what I have elsewhere called the spiritual Indo-Englishman. Examples : Vivekananda, Tagore, Iqbal, and Pandit Nehru. Even Gandhi, a pukka Hindu though he was, had many English elements in his make-up. Aurobindo is, of course, a perfect citizen of the world, combining in his vision the gleams of various nations. He is a symbol of the entente between East and West.

And the same example of communion is to be found in A.E., Sir Francis Younghusband, Clifford Bax, Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham, and many others, including T. S. Eliot.

But what other points of contact are there between English and Indians ?

Well, both have the same sense of humour—that is, they laugh at the same things. Shakespeare's comedies, for example, are hardly popular in France. Emile Legouis, I recall, told me that he found them boring. "They are the least durable part of the poet's work," he said ; "they are full of local and perishable elements." Indians do not share this view. They enjoy these plays as much as any Englishman.

It is the same with other manifestations of the English comic spirit. Indians find a delight in the *Pickwick Papers* and similar writings. And how they roll with laughter at the doings of Jeeves.

I have, while lecturing, related the same story to Indian and English audiences, and both have laughed spontaneously. Test it for yourself.

A missionary had converted a Buddhist to Christianity, and was rather proud of it. One day the Buddhist came to the missionary and said in a sepulchral voice : " Something terrible has happened to me."

" What ? "

" I can't describe it properly. It is too terrible for words."

" Have you robbed someone ? "

" No."

" Have you killed someone ? "

" No."

" Then what can it be ? "

" It is awful. I am all in a sweat about it."

The missionary scratched his head, and stood reflecting. At last he spoke : " Well, pray to Jesus Christ and he will give you peace."

" Are you quite sure ? "

" Perfectly—that is, if you pray with all your heart and soul."

There and then the Buddhist fell on his knees and said : " Oh, Jesus Christ, if you are great and good, as this priest says you are, please grant me a vision of the Buddha whom I have not seen in my dreams for three weeks."

Indians and English, I have said, have the same sense of humour. I made the same remark during the late war in some article of mine. Edward Thompson wrote to me : " I was much struck by your suggestion that Indians and English have the same sense of humour. This is true, but I have never seen it mentioned before. . . ." I am glad to have made a little discovery.

The English like satire. So do we Indians. But I must say that Indians have a finer comprehension of irony than the English. They can, when they like it,

puncture vanity so effectively that the operation is hardly noticed.

Elsewhere I have spoken of English nonsense verse. Again, Indians enjoy it. Indeed, they possess samples of it in their own literature. The French care little for this sort of thing.

English idealism and Indian pantheism have much in common. Often they speak the same language. But it would need a monograph to do justice to this theme. I merely indicate it.

The Buddhist theory of life is shared by such differently gifted writers as Shakespeare and Bertrand Russell. This only confirms a private theory of mine—that a thinker, in so far as he is honest with himself and with others, is bound to be a Buddhist.

The Vedanta says that everything is ultimately a form of energy or movement. Modern science is affirming the same thing to-day in its own way.

Pater has written : “ For the true illustration of the speculative temper is not the Hindu mystic, lost to sense, understanding, individuality, but one such as Goethe, to whom every moment of life brought its contribution of experimental, individual knowledge ; by whom no touch of the world of form, colour, and passion was disregarded.” Poor Pater ! He seems to have known as little of mysticism as of Hinduism. But impressive nonsense such as his is being perpetrated even to-day. It is high time to put an end to it. Here is the true spirit of Hinduism ; it is given in an old Sanskrit poem entitled *The Salutation of the Dawn*

#### LISTEN

To the Exhortation of the Dawn :

Look well to this Day ! for

It is Life. The very Life of Life.

In its brief course lie all the verities—

And realities of your existence—

The Bliss of Growth  
The Glory of Action  
The Splendour of Beauty.

For yesterday is but a dream,—  
And to-morrow is only a vision,  
But To-Day well Lived  
Makes every yesterday a dream of happiness  
And every to-morrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to This Day !  
Such is the Salutation of the Dawn.

Further comment is unnecessary. Men always meet  
on the heights. Fools and knaves clash in the night.











